The Wasteland

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The Wasteland

by Beguile

Summary

You can take the man out of the psychiatric hospital, but you can’t take the psychiatric hospital out of the man. Will recovers from Baltimore after his release. Post-Savoureux.

Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

I’m sorry, NBC. I just can’t wait until 2014 to see Will’s release. Apologies if your willful suspension of disbelief is utterly mangled by my desperate plot device to vindicate him and prove his innocence. My impatience will be the death of me.

Title and quotations are taken from T.S. Eliot's poem of the same name.

Inside-Out

"In this decayed hole among the mountains

In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing

Over the tumbled graves"

~T.S. Eliot, "The Wasteland" (385-387)

The Wasteland

Chapter One: Inside-Out

They expect him to fight; he doesn't. Thirty-one days into his sentence, convicted on several counts of murder, Will knows better than to fight anymore. Besides, he's had this date coming from the beginning. It has only ever been a matter of time before the men in white coats showed up to take him for a short walk to an electric charge.

Will remembers watching *Frankenstein* with Dad on television as a boy and reeling from the shock when the lightning hit the monster. He relives that agony now as they invite him to do this the easy way. Empathy doesn't prepare him for things like this. His empathy is all flight response, but there's nowhere to run except straight into their hands.

Barney makes small talk with him as they cuff him. Will wishes he could be angry, but Barney's niceties are about the only thing that makes him feel sane anymore. Barney feeds the only delusion Will has left with his polite smiles, his friendly demeanor, his simple questions. He asks Will how he's doing as if Will has any other answer for him except awful, as if Will has any other life except for the one carefully contained in four stone walls and a basement ceiling.

He reminds Will to stay calm; this will all be over soon. The procedure is pretty much routine. "You won't be conscious for it," Barney adds consolingly. The undercurrent of sadness in his voice is audible even to Will, whose head buzzes already with anxiety. He musters a nod though, just for Barney, wincing as the jagged pieces of his psyche claw against one another from the movement. They'll settle soon. Electricity will fracture them down into granules, melt them back into a perfect sheet of perfect glass. They'll reflect all the crap that Chilton has been telling him: he has committed murder, that he remembers committing murder, that he wants to commit more murders. Will almost laughs at the bitterness of going to a mental institution in order to be driven mad, but they're about to knock him unconscious and electrocute his brain. He's not up for laughing right now.

Lecter – *damn him* – once said that there were no forts in Will's head for things he loved. At the time, Will believed him, but now, on the long walk to what could be the end of everything, he finds a stronghold of pleasant memories. He feels his father's fingers in his hair, combing tenderly through the curls. Wet fur and soap under his palms; fishing rods and the tug on the line. Water, salt and fresh, still or choppy, because his first memories are of wading, then swimming. There's the thrill of his first kiss, because she was genuinely excited and Will's mind still whirls with the torpor of her joy. It's one of the rare blessings his empathy has ever given him. He meets Alana for the first time, catches her eye the first time, kisses her for the first time, and just because he might never remember this again, Will imagines that they didn't stop. He imagines himself as stable, imagines having a life outside of death. He drops back underwater and lingers below the surface as the door is locked behind him.

The sight of the gurney and IV nauseate Will. His vision blurs and his head spins away from what few pleasant thoughts he still has all the way into his best case scenario. Maybe he'll be too damaged to care anymore. Maybe, when he wakes up, the only emotions he'll feel will be his own. Maybe he won't be aware of his imprisonment anymore. Will's bottom lip quivers at that thought. Damn Chilton. Damn Lecter. Damn Crawford. The first is destroying him for fame; the second is destroying him for fun; and the third is enabling them both by not doing his job.

They release him from restraints and guide him to the open straps on the gurney. Barney is still talking to him, and Will's doing his best to look attentive, but he's not really listening. He's too busy trying to save the parts of himself worth holding onto. There has to be a part of his brain to hide the important memories. Will makes a short list and starts reciting them mentally like a prayer: I am Will Graham, I am not a killer, I am not insane, I cannot trust anyone, least of all Hannibal Lecter.

(*Alana, Dad, Winston, water, Abigail, antlers, home, home, home...*)

"You can relax, Mister Graham," Chilton's voice cuts through his internal monologue. "This will all be over soon enough."

Will doesn't even dignify that with a response. He wants to: oh, he wants to. But Chilton's got his finger on the trigger, and Will would rather not receive a bigger bullet than necessary. He takes a deep breath. "Let's not waste time then."

"No, let's not do that."

The IV plunges into his vein followed by a cold snake of saline in his arm.

I am Will Graham. I am not a killer. I am not insane. I cannot trust anyone.

(*Dad. Alana. Winston. Abigail. Home. Home. Home.)*

"Just administering a sedative now," Barney tells him. "You're just going to go to sleep, Will. When you wake up, it'll all be over."

Truer words were never spoken. Will grits his teeth against the sudden burst of heat in his arm and focuses all his energy on *I am Will Graham. I am not a killer. I am not insane.*

(Dad. Alana...Winston...abigail...home... home... home...)

Will dreams of electricity.

He wakes up sluggish, disoriented. Everyone's face is a blur. The room is a slurry of swirling images and garbled voices. Chilton's pitchy southern drawl jousts with an authoritative baritone and is knocked cleanly off its high horse. Will tries to blink, but his eyelids just end up staying closed, prying open only when a hand gently pats his cheek.

"The sedation should only last a few more minutes."

"Come on, Will...come on...wake up."

One of the side effects of ECT is confusion. Barney told him that before, in his cell. He'll be alright in twenty minutes or so. He just needs to breathe. Just breathe.

"Will," Crawford's voice bears down upon him, heavy and insistent. "Wake up, Will. Come on."

This has to be a hallucination. A misfire. No matter how real it feels (*"SOMEONE GET THESE RESTRAINTS AND ELECTRODES OFF OF HIM NOW!"*), this is all just some terrible side effect of a terrible procedure. This is the universe taunting him. Will feels sick from how much it hurts. He's going to wake up and have lost everything except the faded dream of an eleventh hour rescue.

"The drugs should be wearing off soon."

The electrodes tug on Will's hair and drag him back to a smeary reality. Crawford's bulk is visible at his right, looming behind some poor orderly who's shaking as he unbuckles the strap on Will's arm. Barney's at his head, tugging electrodes off his brow. Will's jaw is slack and difficult to control, but he has to ask, "Is it now?"

His hands are free. The IV is disconnected, causing his whole forearm to sting. Will tries to speak again, this time concentrating extra hard on not mumbling. "Is it now?" he asks. "Is this real?"

"It's real, Will," Crawford says.

Barney finishes with the electrodes while the other orderlies lift Will's legs out of the ankle restraints on the gurney. It doesn't make much difference: he doesn't have the strength to sit up.

"Leave," Crawford dismisses them.

Will nods to Barney when it's all over. Even if they are hallucinations, he can still be polite.

The room is suddenly very, very quiet. Will slips immediately back into a doze, chemical calm keeping him from worrying about whether this is all a dream. When he opens his eyes again after what feels like seconds, Crawford is still standing at his right, arm braced against the wall, face set in an expression Will doesn't recognize.

Not a dream then. Or maybe Will's delusions are permanent now. He's really not sure, and there's no one he can think to ask. What was he supposed to remember? He is Will Graham. He is not a killer. He is not insane. He cannot trust anyone. Well, at least he recalls that much. The memories of the murder still don't exist. Chilton might actually have to perform some real psychiatry after this fiasco.

Crawford pats his hand against the wall, steadying himself before turning to look at Will. "We made it just in time," he says. "A minute later and..."

Will can't speak, and this time it's not from the lingering effects of the sedation or the muscle relaxant. This could still be a dream. A never ending fantasy. After thirty-one days, that seems like a more likely scenario.

"Abigail Hobbs's body turned up in a field last night," Crawford says, "Mounted on a stag's head."

He has to swallow. His mouth is dry. "Just like the first victim."

"She's covered in DNA, Will," Crawford's expression gets even more downtrodden.

Will has a hard time keeping his bottom lip from quivering now. "This isn't real," he stares at the ceiling, eyelids fluttering as his mind drifts back into orbit around the waking world. "This isn't real. You can't be real."

"Will..."

"Whose DNA?"

"Not yours."

And that's all that really matters in this case. Will's pretty scattered at the moment, but he's beginning to understand what exactly was happening when he woke up. "Am I being released?"

"Not yet," Crawford replies, "but I've got Zeller, Price, and Katz working on a case right now that should see you transferred to a minimum security facility until your case can be overturned."

Will doesn't think a hallucination would abide so closely to the rules of reality. Certainly not in his mind, where stags immolate and are stuck mid-shift into human form.

“I’m so sorry, Will,” Crawford says without looking at him. Lost, Will’s brain finally supplies the proper adjective for Crawford’s expression. He feels the older agent’s emotions passing through him now. Crawford’s failure overwhelms Will, leaving him reeling and sick again. He hates that Crawford feels guilty, sad, and lost. Crawford hasn’t earned the right to feel any of those things.

“I want to go home,” Wills says.

He doesn’t wait for Crawford to respond before closing his eyes again and shutting out the world.

Outside-In

Chapter Notes

Hannibal still hasn't come back. My fiancé is sick of listening to me speculate. Thank you, Fannibals, for indulging me. I hope this installment is satisfying.

"April is the cruellest month, breeding

Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing

Memory and desire"

~T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland* (1-3)

Chapter Two: Outside-In

Will expects to find himself back in his cell when he opens his eyes next, but he's still lying on the gurney in treatment. Jack's made sure Will stays under his watchful eye while he arranges a transfer. His phone conversations are short, clipped, but they don't need to be verbose. He's Jack Crawford; his tone says it all.

The dizziness has dissipated, so Will struggles to sit upright. He leans, elbows on knees, over the edge of the gurney in a slouch. Barney is allowed to take his vitals, but then he's dismissed again. Will's not up for talking, but he sees Jack searching through contacts for resources and reminds the older agent, "Not Dr. Lecter."

"What?"

For a man obsessed with keeping Will nearby, Jack certainly forgets about him quickly. Will's bitterness is rampant in his voice. "*Not* Dr. Lecter. He can't have anything to do with my case."

Jack gives Will a very thorough twice-over. The older agent is both pained and disturbed by what he sees. "You've had a traumatic time," he says, "and I'm sorry for that."

"This isn't post-traumatic stress, Jack."

"That was a fever-dream, Will. Let it go."

“I want to,” Will admits. For once, it’s the truth. He’s soured now from being locked away, rotten to the core: scrambled by Chilton, unhinged by illness, closed off by imprisonment, and distrusting out of sheer self-preservation. He wants to get as far away from Jack Crawford as he can. “But whoever did this is still out there.”

“We have his DNA.”

“You have DNA,” Will clarifies. “This copycat framed me for five murders without leaving any evidence at my home or any of the crime scenes. He isn’t going to start leaving his DNA lying around now.”

Jack gives that theory some credence at the very least. “Then why leave trace evidence at all? And why now?”

The answer comes quickly to Will. He’s spent so much of his sentence inside the copycat’s head, whether by choice or by force. More importantly, the answer’s glaring him in the face as his eyes dance round the room again. “Because he doesn’t want me...damaged,” Will swallows the lump generated by the site of ECT machine. “Not anymore than I already am, anyways.”

The silence that follows is filled with might haves, could haves, and almost dids. Will feels all the horrifying possibilities, and he knows Jack feels them too even if he doesn’t want Jack to feel them. Those are for him to know and him alone.

He is relieved that Jack breaks the quiet before it breaks him though. “And you really believe that Hannibal Lecter has something to do with it?”

There’s no easy way to answer that question. If he was in the mood to be honest with Jack, Will would say that he doesn’t know. He’s still not up for trusting Jack again though, so instead, Will says, “I don’t think he *hasn’t* something to do with it.”

Jack wears a wary expression on his face, the one he wore in the interrogation room. The one that lets Will know exactly how crazy he sounds. As if he needs a reminder. He scans the room. Even fashioned with dry wall and painted in pastel, Will still senses the stone walls enclosing him. Dressed up or dressed down, madness still feels the same, and nobody is ever going to let him forget where he belongs.

“Alana is making arrangements anyways,” Jack says, changing the subject to something more productive.

“Where?” Will asks.

“Did you have somewhere in mind?”

His laugh is so brittle it shatters in the air. “Somewhere far away from here. No more Dr. Chilton. No more meds.”

“No more shrinks while I’m at it too, is that right?”

“Just...somewhere I can be alone,” Will declares. “Somewhere with a view.”

“You’re not getting locked up again, Will.”

“I wish I could believe that.”

“I mean it.”

“Yeah, right now,” Will remarks. “And if this copycat comes back with more evidence, plays around with my head some more...” he laughs again. His voice is crumbling; his tone is hollow. Bitterness informs every syllable. “You said you were bedrock.”

Jack’s demeanor steels. “I am.”

Will nods sadly. Jack’s bedrock alright. He’s just not underfoot providing a strong foundation. Will feels his solidity reinforcing the walls and restraints at the hospital and is crushed. His head hangs in defeat. “I just misjudged where I stood.”

The window holds Will’s attention for a long time after that. It’s a terrible view: only the parking lot is visible, and what little lawn Will can see is flooded, brown, and sludgy. The world’s in the midst of a meltdown. Still, it’s a view. Will’s only view for the past month has been from the high windows in the shoddy hospital gymnasium where he’s allowed to walk, once a week, on a chain and leash. Even then, it’s only of the sky, and Chilton picks the grayest days for his exercise.

(He wonders where Hannibal is while walking. What does the good doctor do with his freedom?)

Will takes in all in, reeling from the shock of lost time. He remembers snow still clinging to the evergreen branches when he was admitted. He remembers the bite of frost on his sinuses with every breath. The world’s kept spinning in his absence though. People have gone on living, the Ripper has gone on Ripping, and this copycat killer, the one who knows so much about him, is inviting him back into the game.

Will folds his arms over his chest, stifling a shiver. He isn’t sure he wants to play anymore. Isn’t sure he *can* play anymore.

Jack offering Will his phone rouses the latter from his reverie. “It’s Alana – she wants to talk to you.” Will’s lips purse. Maybe rejoining the world isn’t the best thing for him right now. Chilton’s kept his visitors to a minimum since his treatment began. He’s even less socially adept than he was before his admission. The thought of Alana makes him sad too. He misses the opportunities they never had and knows they’ll never have again.

He has to wonder how deeply Hannibal’s claws have sunk into her since he’s been locked away as well. Not because he wants to: his survival depends on it.

“Will?”

“Hi,” he tries to sound casual, but there’s no suppressing the electric current that runs through him when he hears her voice. Will can see her so clearly in his mind’s eye, feels all

her desperation, all her sad hope and anguish and joy. The experience from that single exchange is overwhelming; it's been so long since he's felt something honest and pure outside of Barney. He almost drops the phone from shaking.

Alana seems to be having the same problem. It takes an eternity for her to find words. "Jack says you want somewhere with a view."

"I want a lot of things," Will admits quietly. "I want out of here."

"There's a room at Porthaven open."

"No," he answers immediately. "I can't go back there." For so many reasons: because of Abigail, because of Hannibal, because of himself.

(If he had left her there, she would still be alive.)

"I want..." no, that's not right, but the right word's difficult to utter given Will's detachment from it. "I *need* out. Away. Somewhere...away."

Even her silence is understanding. "Bethesda's an option. They're right on the water. Low security. Great director."

He could listen to her reading the OED for the rest of his life: that's how good Alana Bloom sounds after so long spent in the shadows.

"You'll have to cooperate, Will."

"I will do anything," he says.

"They emphasize group therapy at Bethesda."

"*Anything*." After Chilton, even group sounds pleasant.

Alana takes another minute to respond. Will basks in the silence and knows exactly what she's feeling. She doesn't think he's ready to be with a group or that he can possibly know what he needs having been narrowly saved from ECT. He's amazed that she tells him, then, "I'll make the arrangements."

Will releases a breath he hasn't realized he's been holding. "Thank you."

Her smile is small but audible. Will runs his fingers over the window pane, heart darkening immediately at the sight of the trees. The spectre of his wendigo lingers ominously in his periphery. *I'm coming for you*, he promises.

"You're welcome," Alana replies. "Now, there's someone...seven someones who need to say hello."

Those dark places in his heart dissipate immediately. Will listens as the quiet fills with the sounds of breathless whines, whimpers, and small yips. "Say hi," Alana urges. Will's not

sure if it's a prompt for him or the dogs. He hopes for the latter. His voice is gone, his throat has closed, and his hand kneads against the glass in search of fur.

Sniffles. Not from him: one of the dogs is sniffing the phone searchingly, imploringly.

Will smiles. "Hello, Winston."

He lets the sounds of barking fill him right up.

Will remembers shorelines where he could not see where the sky ended and the water began, and the sheer immensity of the world came as a great comfort to him. He stood outside of himself, adrift and detached, and felt his place as a small, fragile piece of a much larger system. Now, standing at the front door of the Baltimore Psychiatric Hospital, he gets a sinking feeling that he's a smaller piece in someone else's game. That he's a rehabilitated animal being released into a wild he's not prepared for, where the predator is just lying in wait.

Will stares the world down. He is unprepared for this. All the bravado bled out of him when Crawford walked him out of treatment, when it became apparent that he wasn't going back to his hole in the ground. Except that he has to get out of here; he has a game of his own to prey.

Jack holds the door for him. Will's stride still keeps to the confines of phantom chains, and he can't push past them. Once he starts moving though, he can't stop. He's past the threshold. He's standing in the springtime air. He smells wood, water, sweet grass, and rot. Listens hard to the wind dancing through the budding trees. Drinks everything in with his ever moving eyes from the pavement under his feet to the horizon.

He stops halfway down the steps. The hairs on the back of his neck are sticking up. It's too big. There are too many spaces to hide, including plain sight. Will is paralyzed from the magnitude. The urge to turn back grips him, because behind him lies a cell he knows by heart, a drug regimen that keeps him compliant, and a psychiatrist who's not afraid to tell him who he is. It's not living, but it's also not dying, and Will feels that his death is imminent out here.

Jack's hand is solid on his spine. He doesn't push, just secures, focuses, guides. Will's only choice is to step forward in order to get away, and the only thing lying in front of him that he knows for certain is the rest of the world.

He can't get into the SUV fast enough.

Thrown for a Loop

Chapter Notes

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House hunting is awful, not in the least because it keeps me from composing fanfiction. Thank you to those that reviewed, kudoed/favourited, followed, read or even glanced at this fic. I hope you're all having lovely days!

"What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow

Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,

You cannot say, or guess, for you know only

A heap of broken images"

~*The Wasteland* (25-28)

Chapter Three: Thrown for a Loop

Abigail's blood spatters against the cupboards the same way rain spatters against the windows. Or is that...? Yes, that ought to have been the other way round.

She cries when he kills her, not because he's killing her (though that fact most assuredly informs her tears). Abigail cries more because he's finishing her father's work. Will looms behind her, hand pressed with the tenderest of force against her chin, thumb crushed against her cheek. The knife is sharp. He tells her he doesn't want her to feel any pain, not because of how much her pain would hurt him, but because she doesn't deserve pain. Abigail is a victim in the truest sense. She's collateral damage; her father was just an under achiever.

Will cuts so deeply that she doesn't get a chance to scream. Shock takes her as the first torrent of blood leaps out of her neck and drains across the cupboards. By the time he tears

through the opposite side of her neck, Abigail is dead, and she falls to the floor where Garrett Jacob Hobbs tried to lay her to rest months ago.

He doesn't wake up until her glassy eyes are fixed on him.

"Will?"

The heat is on but he's shivering anyways. Will hugs himself, grimacing from the pain in his chest. He's having trouble keeping up with his racing heart, because this isn't the first time he's dreamt about killing Abigail. This isn't the first time he's woken up without knowing where he is. This isn't the first time he's had trouble distinguishing whether or not he's actually awake.

Jack's hand is on his shoulder. Definitely awake then. "Will."

They're on the road. To a body? No. Will shakes himself into a close approximation of sense. Bethesda: he's transferring to Bethesda. And he didn't kill Abigail Hobbs, not even close.

"What's wrong?" Jack asks. "Talk to me, Will."

"Oh, now you want to talk," he leans his head against the window in an effort to ground himself further. Jack's hand has slipped from his shoulder and Will feels himself drifting into the stratosphere. "I didn't mean that. I'm sorry," he scrubs at his face. "I've got chills. I'm nauseated."

"Do you need me to pull over?"

Will shakes his head. Oh, bad idea. He settles on speaking. There's less vertigo that way. "What time is it?"

"Just after four."

"I missed afternoon meds," Will replies, feeling worse now that he knows his current illness isn't purely psychological.

Jack sounds skeptical, as usual. "All this from afternoon meds?"

"Dr. Chilton subsidizes shoddy psychotherapy with shoddier psychopharmacology," Will's stomach rolls alongside the wheels of Jack's SUV. "I've been on uppers, downers, side-to-siders; anti-psychotics, anti-seizures, anti-emetics, anti-pyretics; I'm missing clumps of hair on the back of my head."

"I noticed."

"Yeah, well, thanks for not mentioning it."

"He'll have to release all that information to Bethesda for your continued care."

After Will shot Hobbs, Jack called it therapy. When they thought he killed Abigail, Will received treatment. Now, he gets care. Will breathes through another wave of nausea and distracts himself by thinking of other, less aggravating explanations for his current condition. "They've also fasted me since last night."

Jack's face twists a little. Another oversight on his part. Minor in comparison to getting a trainee killed, but the physics of Jack's guilt don't register the mass of failures. They fall at the same rate and strike him with the same level of force. "I haven't been eating much anyways," Will offers. He's not sure if that's supposed to console Jack or hurt him more. It's probably a little of both.

"I can stop somewhere."

"I'm not hungry. Bethesda will have their own drug regimen for me anyways. I'll have to go through detox."

"Let them help you through that, Will."

"I don't want help."

The words are out of his mouth before he can stop them. Weeks of rebuking Chilton has trained Will to rebuke without thinking, and Jack's the last person he wants to start antagonizing now. He doesn't need another psychiatrist like Chilton or Lecter who wants to tell him who he is. "I didn't mean that," Will says.

"No, Will, I know you did," but there's not an ounce of malice in Jack's tone to suggest that assertion offended him. The older agent is crestfallen. Will's never seen him like this before. "But I don't think you're in the position to know what you want and what you need right now."

Will shuts his mouth tightly. Jack, he hates to admit, has a point: Will knows who he is, where he is, why he's there, and that Hannibal cannot be trusted, but everything else in his life is scattered right now. He wants to go home, but he doesn't want to ask if his home still exists. He wants to see his dogs but can't bear the thought of failing them as a caregiver. He wants to see Alana but doesn't want to interact with her. Life is Schrödinger's cat right now, and the longer Will avoids it, the longer he gets to believe that he isn't just a dead man walking.

He swallows hard. Apparently he knows one more thing for certain. "Pull over, Jack," Will says. "I don't *want* to throw up in your car."

Alana's waiting for them at the doors to Bethesda when they arrive. An orderly is waiting behind her, but Will's not interested in him. He's only looking at Alana.

Will almost doesn't recognize her without the wounded expression she normally wears on the rare occasions she's allowed to visit. Her face has hardened despite her best efforts.

The small smile she wears creases against the stiff contours of her facial muscles. Will knows her rigidity isn't for him. Alana's angry at the same things he is, but the last thing he needs empathetically right now is anger. He's already angry. Anger isn't going to get him anything except killed at this point.

Thankfully, when he steps out of the car - on hollow, shaking legs and weak ankles, the taste of vomit not quite gone from his mouth - Alana's understanding and compassion wash through him in waves. She has him in her arms before he can close the vehicle door behind him. It's disorienting, all of it, the hug least of all. Bethesda is an open facility, homely. Probably was a home at some point in its history. The building welcomes patients with a single story entrance, tended gardens, latticed fences, and comely benches for visitation. There's a security system, but iron bars and heavy locks would upset the decor of the place, so Will doesn't anticipate finding any. He finds that even the orderly maintains a relaxed stance. No need for bravado or posturing here; the inmates rarely act up, and when they do, it's not difficult to subdue them again.

(Will's joints stiffen at the thought. He hasn't got any fight left. What little he had was fought out of him in Baltimore.)

The sheer vastness of it all – the open spaces, the possibilities – is terrifying. Will finds himself hugging Alana back not only out of affection but as a clutch for a whole new kind of balance. The dangers at Baltimore were clearly defined and knowable. Will knew were Hannibal's influence lay. He doesn't know Bethesda, doesn't know what doctors have dined at Hannibal's table, what their credentials are. Alana's recommendation only means as much as the results: she did recommend Hannibal.

Will's social skills are weaker than before his incarceration, but he recalls the duration of friendly hugs as being shorter than the one Alana's giving him now. "I vomited on the ride over," he admits, "I can't smell good."

"You don't," Alana replies. "My happiness is overwhelming my olfactory sense."

"Happy that I'm not guilty?"

"I knew you weren't guilty," now she releases him. "I'm happy that other people know it too."

Her eyes flash to Jack. There's that anger again. And then, just like that, Alana's looking back at Will and it's gone, replaced with compassion and understanding. "You're trembling, Will."

"It's been a long day,"

She nods. "Can you walk?"

The orderly straightens. He knows his cues even without being told. Will stiffens, straightens, and lists away from Alana. The orderlies at Baltimore knew their cues too. He could read their posture: the intent to restrain, to call for back-up, to report to Chilton. "Yes, I can walk," Will says, glaring at the orderly to stand down.

“Relax, Will,” Jack warns him. Will’s breathing has picked up again with his knowing.

“I am relaxed,” he says lamely, getting himself back under control.

“This isn’t Baltimore,” Alana takes him by the arm and starts moving him away from the vehicle. Will’s head spins around in the open space the second he’s away from the vehicle. He leans into Alana, and she leans right back to support him. “There won’t be a lock on the door of your room. You’re free to come and go as you like provided you stay on the grounds of the facility.”

“No hopping over fences,” Will mutters bitterly. His perception is tunneling the closer they get to the door and that orderly. Thankfully, he doesn’t mention that the only thing he wants to do is run as fast as he can in the opposite direction.

“The director’s Dr. Frances Lampman,” Alana says.

“Johns Hopkins?”

“McGill.”

Means nothing. Lecter knows everyone worth knowing.

“She’s new to the States.”

Will perks up a little. “She familiar with the case?”

“Getting there,” Alana says. “She does good work, Will. I trust her.”

“You trust Dr. Lecter too.”

He expects her to pull from him, but Alana’s harder to hurt now. She’s been wounded enough already, and he’s not really aiming for a good nerve. “Do you trust me?”

“Yes,” Will’s response is so automatic it could be condition. He thinks about it and realizes, “No.” Then, “Yes, completely. Just...”

“Not about Hannibal.”

He speaks quietly so that Jack can’t hear, “Anything about Hannibal.”

“I know that I will never completely understand what you were going through, Will...”

“Then please, don’t try,” he begs. “Just please, please believe me when I say that there is something...dark about Hannibal Lecter, something shady, something that I...I don’t even think I can identify.”

“I believe,” Alana’s tone is diplomatic, “that *you* believe that.”

“Why would I make this up?”

“Will,” she holds him steady. Will’s shaking more violently now. The orderly’s at attention again, readying his approach. “I’m not saying that you made this up. I’m saying that you can’t know what motivated your suspicions then. Your brain was swollen, your temperature had skyrocketed, you were sleep-deprived, stressed...give yourself some time to recuperate. Then I promise, we can sit down and have a long conversation about Hannibal Lecter.”

Will gets himself back under control. “That will be too late,” he replies, eyeing the orderly suspiciously.

“You’re okay to walk, Mr. Graham?” the orderly asks. He has that same helpful, unassuming tone that Barney does, but that just puts Will more on his guard. “Dr. Bloom says you’ve had a rough day so far.”

“I’m fine,” Will answers curtly. Alana steers him past the orderly towards the door. He notices a wheel chair has been in arm’s reach of the man the whole time. There are no restraints on it, not for his arms, legs, or his chest.

Will thinks that’s strange.

Fear in a Handful of Trust

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

I saw on the *Hannibal* Facebook page that Will was originally supposed to stop at Alana's house before going to Hannibal's in "Savoureux". I allude to that in the chapter.

Apologies for the delay! I have been traveling. The next chapter will likely take some time too. I appreciate your patience. Hope you enjoy!

"...where the sun beats,

And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,

And the dry stone no sound of water. Only

There is shadow under this red rock"

~*The Wasteland* (22-25)

Chapter Four: Fear in a Handful of Trust

Lampman's eyes keep creeping back to him. Even when she isn't looking at him, Will's skin crawls. He tries to distract himself, but she's winding up for something. She's *interested* in him, and Will bristles to think why. He's the psychiatric equivalent to John Merrick, a major find for any doctor. Lampman could be counting the number of academic papers she can publish. She's probably planning to collaborate on a study with Dr. Chilton. They could write a book with Freddie Lounds and then parade a hackneyed facsimile of Will's psychology around the world.

He rubs his eyes and the bridge of his nose. The fizzling in his skull is making it difficult to concentrate, so his imagination keeps rattling right back to Baltimore. Back to those cold mornings handcuffed to a chair, Chilton fumbling around in his brain with drugs, accusations, and an insufferable level of self-importance. Handcuffs nip at his wrists and ankles. The building creaks with age and chill. Will can normally shake himself out of

things like that, but today, he can't. He's shackled to his recollections of Baltimore, and the thought that he might always be nags him.

"Mr. Graham?"

Three concerned faces greet him when he returns to reality. Will can't find anywhere to look that isn't someone's eyes. He scans the wall: Lampman's degrees, no pictures (*I must be objective with my patients*) but small ornaments made of metal, wood and peacock feathers (*I must still appear to be human*); wooden filing cabinets (*I do not want to look imposing or threatening*); a desk chair that leaves her on the same level as her patients (*I want to look people in the eye; I am not their superior: I am their equal*). Will sees her logical, practical approach to psychiatry. The mind is a combination lock, and Lampman intends to solve it and set her patients free.

Will winds up so tightly inside himself that all Lampman can see is a blank slate. He buries his secrets under layers and layers of carefully crafted artifice. Lampman's gaze still creeps under his skin, probing, searching. She's a finder of lost things; it's only a matter of time before she finds him. "Would you mind if we had a word alone, Mr. Graham?"

"I think everything that needs to be said has been said," Will even smiles – *smiles*. It's a disturbingly fake expression, but he feels fake, so at least he finally looks how he feels. Honestly, he has no idea what's been said, only that, given that Alana's been speaking, it's probably accurate and helpful.

Lampman is the exact opposite of convinced, but she lets it slide. There will be plenty of time to unlock Will later when he isn't so destroyed from the day's events. "Dr. Chilton is still compiling the list of your medications," she says, still looking at Will.

He nods, remembering. "There was a lot of medication."

"I don't suppose you know what you were on."

"Dr. Chilton wasn't required to share," Will's lips curl in disgust.

"He's required to share with me," Lampman declares.

Will can't tell whether the edge in her voice is for him or Chilton.

Alana's brought him clean pajamas and a new robe to wear. Will changes in the exam room next to Lampman's office, and then he's back to being poked and prodded. Two nurses do a physical that Will doesn't really remember. Blood's drawn, pressure's measured, pupils dilate...he wants to be alone. Couldn't they just leave him alone?

Every time they ask him a question, Will answers in their voices, mirroring their life stories back to them. His pitch goes up and his vocabulary broadens for the burly nurse built like a line backer; he speaks in to-the-point monosyllables for the diminutive nurse who can't

stop smiling. Lampman's voice is stern and precise. Will doesn't have her strength, but he matches the tone nevertheless.

His left arm stings suddenly and flares with heat. Will almost jumps out of his own skin, but Alana's hand is on his shoulder rubbing in slow circles as the smaller nurse tapes the IV catheter in place. The fluids feel good. His body sucks back on the saline, and Will gradually perks back up to his usual morose self. Words start making sense again, bodies don't blur, and his head doesn't throb quite so much. Will knows himself again and stays firmly rooted inside his own body instead of flitting off into everyone else's perspective.

They give him an Aspirin too. His first Aspirin since before Minnesota. Will takes it dry and it tastes like heaven.

"You should eat something, Will," Alana rubs his shoulder a little more firmly. She guides his attention to the tray of hospital issue dinner at his left.

Will waits until their audience disperses before answering. Even Lampman has the courtesy to leave. Only a lone FBI agent hovers by the door, one of Jack's tough young things, who looks about ready to shoot anything with even the makings of a pulse. Will sets his jaw in a hard line. He really is never getting out of Baltimore, is he?

"We're never going to be alone in a room together again, are we?" Will half-asks, half-states, all-knows.

Alana drifts around the exam table he's sitting on until she's back in plain sight. "It's procedure, Will: you know that. Until Jack can get the charges overturned-"

"I still murdered five people," Will stares at the floor.

"Eat something, Will."

"I'm really not hungry."

Alana looks back at the guard at the door. "Could you step outside, please?"

"You don't..."
The guard just shrugs and steps outside the door. Not even her shadow is visible.

"That was too easy," Alana comments. Will agrees. He waits for her to be marched back inside by Jack, but no one else comes. Alana finally turns back around and pushes the tray of food towards him.

"I'm really not hungry."

"I'm really not in the mood to negotiate."

Neither is he, not really. Will wants this hell day to be over. Glumly, he reaches for the least offensive thing on the tray, the small covered bowl of broth and limp chicken, and proceeds to poke at it. Hannibal's black bird concoction comes back to him in a rush. The good doctor would be ashamed to serve something like this. Will's appetite returns out of his

desire for vengeance. Each salty bite becomes a tiny blow against Hannibal's influence, petty as that seems.

"How long am I here for?" Will asks between bites.

"Until the court overturns your conviction," Alana says, folding her arms across her chest. She looks only slightly less tired than he is. "Price, Zeller, and Katz purposefully took their time with your house, so it hasn't been put on the market. Not that people haven't made offers."

"I'm a serial killer celebrity, then?"

"Don't do this, Will."

"I doubt Freddie Lounds would have it any other way."

"Let's talk about Freddie Lounds later, okay?"

"We'll talk about Freddie later, we'll talk about Hannibal later...is there anyone I am allowed to talk about right now with you?"

Alana doesn't even flinch. She casts a sad, sideways smile in his direction. "We could talk about you."

Will's stomach coils around the soup like a snake trying to strangle its prey. There is nothing he can say even if he wanted to. "Let's talk about you."

She considers this, then offers, "I've taught classes, seen patients, raised a brood of dogs."

"Had dinner with Hannibal?"

"I thought we weren't going to talk about Hannibal."

"I just wanted to make your account of the last thirty-one days accurate."

Alana meets his challenge with poise and finesse. She's far more equipped to play games than he is right now. Will's shooting till he hits something and she's a moving target. "Very well: yes, I've had dinner with Hannibal. I've also had dinner with Katz, two of my colleagues from Boston, several PhD candidates, and one of my brothers."

The silence in the room is deafening. It's worse than the harshening bite of Alana's voice as she deflects his accusations towards her friend and mentor. Will, to his credit, is far too tired to be agitated, but he sinks a little lower on the table in defeat. He can't go around picking fights if he truly wants to challenge someone like Dr. Lecter. Sensing this, Alana defuses the conversation. "I'd like to have dinner with you, Will, if you're interested in having company."

Will's head rings with a chorus of warning. Abel Gideon's voice informs him that, "You and I are already committed," while Hannibal Lecter calmly, serenely states...

"I frightened you," Will can't stop himself from saying it. "When I...escaped from custody and came to your house. I frightened you."

He didn't need Hannibal to tell him that. Will was awash in her fear from the moment he arrived at her house that day. He just assumed it was for him, not of him.

"I was terrified that day, Will," Alana says, and it finally dawns on Will that it could have been a mixture of both.

He sets the nearly empty bowl back on the tray. "And what about now?"

She doesn't hesitate for a second. That scares him. "Not at all. I'm not scared of you, Will. You don't scare-"

Will reaches out to touch her. Now, it's Alana's turn to jump, because the second Will moves, the door to the exam room shoots open and Crawford's guard storms back into the room, hand poised over her service weapon.

It takes her a second, but she eventually realizes her error. Her hand lowers. "Sorry," she says and steps back out of the room.

Alana immediately turns her attention back to Will. She's still reeling from the start. "Are you okay?" she asks him.

Will's anxiety has dipped. He's calmer now than he has been all day. "I'm used to it," he replies with a wince.

That comes as no comfort to Alana.

Will's given a powder green room on the main floor right next to the courtyard. It's a functional environment with all the trappings of home but nothing that increase the risk of self-harm, suicide, or homicide. Not that Will's looking to commit any of the aforementioned, only that he's primed to see a space as a serial killer now that he's been treated like one. Also, sparse as Bethesda is, his previous quarters at Baltimore make it look like a five-star hotel.

"I'm leaving you on IV fluids tonight," Lampman says as she paces the room in one final inspection. "Lindsey's our night nurse; she'll be in to check on you. There are no locks on the doors, Mr. Graham, and you are free to go anywhere on the premises except out the front door."

She's kind enough not to mention the bracelet on his wrist designed to lock the facility down if he tries. Will thinks that's a psychiatrist's way of being polite: not reminding their patient how locked up they really are. "Restrooms are down the hall. The door also doesn't lock, but we do try to maintain a patient's privacy."

Will doesn't know how to respond to that. He ends up muttering, "The insane have no rooms of their own."

"Not in this place."

He looks towards Lampman. She doesn't sound entirely happy about that. If she had it her way, the doors would all lock. Insanity would not demarcate bodies as community property. Will doesn't know why that alarms him so much, why he can only respond to Lampman with fear. Chilton didn't intimidate him so much, but Will supposes that he didn't feel threatened by Chilton. Lampman's the type of person who he can already feel inside his head, because she's enough of a humanitarian for him to want her there.

He felt the same way around Hannibal too but for different reasons.

Lampman takes her leave after that with a professional, "Good night." Jack steps inside the room once she departs and inspects the room for himself.

"It's certainly a step up in terms of accommodations," he notes.

Will doesn't respond. It's too soon to be blithe about Baltimore. Alana senses his mood darkening and provides a buffer. "We should be getting you home soon, Will."

He nods mechanically. He will agree with whatever she says to avoid entertaining the alternative. And because right now, he would just like them to both go.

They take their cues, delivering whatever remaining social niceties they have left before departing. Jack says, "I'll be in touch." Alana rubs his arm and bids, "Good night, Will."

Then Will is alone in a room that doesn't feel empty, loaded as it is with the presence of everyone who can get inside. He grits his teeth and basks in his view, however limited, of the courtyard greenery in the fading light. The trees look black now, glossy and inky on the horizon. Something tall and equally dark stretches to its full height within them.

Will blinks. Whatever it is disappears, but he knows it's not really gone.

Happy reading, everyone!

Simulacra

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

Author`s Notes: Two more months till the Blu-Ray!

"At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives

Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea"

~*The Wasteland* (III, 220-221)

Chapter Five: Simulacra

Will wakes up to the feeling of fingers in his mouth and an ear in his throat and Hannibal's voice rumbling at the base of his skull. He jerks from sleep, slamming one arm against the bed rail. Impossibly, the figure looming over the bed doesn't even start. He thinks it's a tree, then a creature, but after some rapid blinking, his eyes adjust to the soft lamplight and she takes on a form that isn't some imaginary anthropomorphic man-eater.

He can't remember her name. Not that he could utter it with how quickly he's breathing.

She's too busy hanging a fresh bag of saline to look him in the eyes. "Do you know where you are?"

"No, but it's coming to me," Will scrubs his face. The room's too hot. She's too close. He wants her to move away but the question dies on his tongue and proceeds to rot in his mouth.

(Like Abigail's ear. Will's stomach churns.)

There's no asking these people anything. They want him calm, complacent, and receptive. Will has learned how to perform a certain measure of all three while his anger simmers just beneath the surface. He knows how to hide in plain sight now, and it no longer kills him to do it.

“Bethesda Psychiatric Facility,” Will finds his voice again as he breathing slows. He doesn’t ask for the time because time doesn’t matter so much anymore.

The nurse nods and inches closer, inspecting him. “Nightmares?” Will nods, shying away from her. She gets the hint and seems to back off a little, but her hand comes out of nowhere and brushes over his brow. Her touch registers as a too hot, too painful electric shock. Scarily though, Will doesn’t recoil. His face just twists in agony. He hasn’t been handled so gently since...since...another electric shock runs through him. Lecter touched his forehead. In the dining room, after his seizure. Will feels that again now with added revulsion. His head throbs.

“You’re warm,” the nurse notes, pulling her hand away at long last. Will’s brow feels cool where she was touching it.

“I’m fine,” he assures her. “Happens all the time. Who are you?”

If she’s going to be manhandling him, Will figures he should know her name.

“I’m Lindsey Burke. Night shift. Sorry for startling you.”

“I get startled when I’m alone in the room,” Will mutters. He glances up to her shoulders. She really is much too close. At Baltimore, the staff only got within five feet of Will to contain him in some fashion. She’s just standing there – watching? Waiting?

Will loses his patience. If she’s going to restrain him or sedate him or force him to watch televised evangel sermons on a continuous loop (one of Chilton’s favourite little torments), she had better do it soon. In the meantime, Will feels the fresh saline going straight from his vein through his pores to his t-shirt, and it won’t be long before puddles collect on the floor. He tears off the soiled garment and hesitates only before tossing it aside.

Baltimore has pretty much eliminated what few manners he had left, not to mention self-consciousness, but Will is suddenly confronted by the strange sensation that he’s done something wrong. Lindsey utters a quick something-or-other and then disappears into the dimly lit hallway. Gone to get help? Will winces, staring at the limp, wet garment pinched between his fingers. All this over a sweat drenched shirt and a nightmare. He sighs and misses Baltimore. Brutality was a business there and an efficient one at that. They would have had a guard in the room so he didn’t have to wait.

Lindsey returns unaccompanied though. Will tries his best to put her at ease, futile as that is with staff at a psychiatric facility. “Look, I’m not trying...”

She reaches the bed and sets a parcel of fabric next to him before closing his IV catheter. “You’re not trying to what?”

“I’m not...” he feels the nightmare-fog around his head lifting and is finally able to read her. “What are you doing?”

“I went to get you a clean shirt,” she says, tossing her head towards the garment on the bed. She detaches his IV and holds it aside so he can completely remove his other shirt. “It’s

probably not as comfortable as that one, but it's clean."

Will really has to think to come up with a response. In Baltimore, he woke alone in the dark and waited till morning to change into clean orange uniform. Now, he's shivering, and she's giving him a clean shirt.

"Do you have a towel?"

Lindsey nods. This is not the strangest request she has received. "I can get you a towel. I'm going to get you some Aspirin too. Lampman also said you're welcome to a sleep aid if you'd like."

Will eyes narrow somewhere around her left shoe. If he'd like. Does that mean he can say no? The very notion that he has a choice leaves him feeling colder and emptier inside, something he didn't think possible. For thirty-one days he's been Chilton's puppet-prisoner. Now some stranger waits for him to give her direction. Will can't form his mouth around the word no anymore, so he settles on a mechanical, unsteady shake of his head.

He waits for Lindsey to try and coerce him, but she just nods. "I'll be back."

She takes his soiled t-shirt with her. Will doesn't ask where it's going or if he'll get it back. He doesn't own anything anymore.

The signifiers of home greet Will when she leaves. It looks as hollow as he feels at that moment. All the rules he's developed for survival don't apply here. He's setting sail on unfamiliar seas, and the only stars to guide him are inside his fractured, fragmented mind.

He unfolds the clean t-shirt and stares at it. Small strokes, Will. He remembers nightmares. He knows fear. Best of all, he has survived worse than this. He can do this.

The towel is prickly, hospital issue, but Will feels better once he's dry.

"I can crack the window," Lindsey offers. The thought hasn't occurred to Will. He's still adjusting to being above ground, let alone in a room with a view. Nodding is more difficult than shaking his head, and the breeze that swells in the room makes him shake with something other than chill. The jagged pieces of himself that had settled after his sentencing get tossed about, and Will feels himself breaking anew.

(*He has survived worse than this.*)

He lays the towel down over the sweat stain he's left on the bed. The clean t-shirt scratches at his skin, but Will appreciates how dry it is. Lindsey returns to his side when he's dressed and very gently reinserts his IV.

The sudden appearance of a needle doesn't surprise Will anymore, but he still bridles whenever he sees one. His reaction is even more pronounced now: because the taste of Abigail is still in his throat, Hannibal Lecter put her in the ground and might have mounted her on a stag's head, and Lindsey doesn't have an armed guard for back-up like Chilton did. He reaches for the IV port, fingers brushing over the tape and tubes. "What is that?"

He almost doesn't want to know. The names of sedatives roll through his brain like elements of the periodic table.

"Just Aspirin," Lindsey reassures him, depressing the plunger. She pulls out the now empty needle and sheathes it. "This will work faster than the capsules."

Will's mouth forms itself around the proper response, but he can't quite say it. He hasn't expressed gratitude in a long time.

"Is there anything else you need?"

She sounds more like a waitress in a restaurant than a nurse. Will bites his tongue before he can say so. Out of touch as he might be with the common person, he knows that's not a socially appropriate response. He settles on another shake of his head.

"Okay," Lindsey shifts his IV stand out of his way before heading for the door. "There's a call button on your bed rail if you need anything. I make rounds every hour though."

His tongue taps against the bottom of his teeth. "Thank you." There: that's what normal people say.

Lindsey shrugs. "You're welcome."

She heads for the door. Before she reaches it, Will's speaking again. "May I-"

She stops. "May you what?"

Will isn't sure he wants to finish. He wishes he didn't start, but now the words are out of his mouth, he has to see it through to the end. "May I use the washroom?"

"To your left," she points, opening and holding the door for him. "Are you okay to walk?"

Will nods shakily, not quite sure if that's the truth, but not willing to accept the opposite. Miraculously, his legs hold him up, and the IV stand provides the necessary support he needs to not fall over. By the time he reaches the door, Will feels oriented again.

Lindsey gestures for him to go before her. Will enters the hallway and lists left, where an open door at the end of the hallway signals his destination.

"You know," he looks back at Lindsey, who's propped his door slightly ajar. She's got a small, hopeful smile on her face, one dampened slightly by the sight of him. Sympathy, Will recalls. This is what sympathy looks like. "You don't have to ask."

He cracks a small, sardonic smile back at her. Yes, Will wants to tell her. Yes, he did. He doesn`t see it as an option anymore not to.

Happy reading!

The Price of Imagination

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

Author`s Notes: According to Fuller, Will's going to get scrappier in Season 2. I'm depicting him as being a little more broken in this fic; hence, his fear at the end of the chapter.

The writing gets a little...graphic here, I think. Apologies.

"My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.

Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak.

What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?

I never know what you are thinking. Think."

~*The Wasteland* (II, 111-114)

Chapter Six: The Price of Imagination

After Will finishes slashing Abigail's throat for the fourth, fifth, sixth time; after he eases her lifeless body to the floor of her kitchen; after he runs a hand through her hair and over her cheek – as if she is sleeping, not dead, because he loves her and wishes better for her; that's when Will takes the knife he is wielding and delicately slices her ear from her head.

(Why the ear? It is softer and therefore easier to swallow.)

He honours her as her father would have until he remembers that Garrett Hobbs didn't get to kill Abigail. Something else spirits her corpse away, something impossibly less humane that Hobbs himself. Something that lives on the fringes of Will's imagination as the one dark place he cannot hope to penetrate. He has Hannibal's face and Will's crimes on his hands and Abigail's blood on his lips.

...and it must be a fever dream, but Will's memory shifts with stunning clarity through pendulum swings to Hobbs's darkened kitchen. To that night, hazy as the recollections are,

when he came to know the truth. Hannibal stares him down over the barrel of the gun. His voice treads softly through Will's head, making the left hemisphere of his brain itch while the right hemisphere burns and burns. Will can't understand what's being said, but he knows, he sees, he feels Lecter as a great void, an endless absence. Lecter is a blackness born of hell itself and set to walk the earth.

Crawford doesn't interrupt them. In the dream, Will fires several rounds into Lecter's head and chest, but Lecter calmly pries the gun from Will's hands. His voice rumbles but again, Will doesn't understand. He just *feels*: loneliness, anguish, disconnect, incompleteness. Lecter is an echo. Every ache Will's ever felt, every scream he's ever withheld, is offered back to him by Hannibal Lecter, who draws him into blackness with more garbled words.

Will melts. Will spills. Will breaks down into tears. Lecter's darkness is as warm and sweet as blood. He feels like home. Those edges he hides fit so perfectly alongside Will's, because they were once two parts of the same whole, torn asunder by fearful Gods and doomed forever to search for one another in despair.

When he's not killing Abigail, Will's working his way through his rap sheet, and not always in chronological order. He snip-snip-snips Dr. Sutcliffe's cheeks, then watches the neurologist's head fall open over the back of his chair. The sound is not unlike splitting a pomegranate. When Georgia Madchen walks in, Will approaches her, scissors outstretched – handles first for safety. By the time he reaches her though, his hands are gripping the meat of her bicep, and he thrusts her forward into antlers because she is now Marissa Schurr. Then Abigail. Then Alana. Then Abigail again.

"I don't take any organs from Marissa Schurr," he narrates. Her body slides slowly across the antlers no matter how hard he pushes.

"Why not, Will?"

Will feels Hannibal's voice inside his head rather than through his ears. He closes his eyes from the way his temporal lobe has started to crawl, and when he looks back, Marissa Schurr is staring at him and trying to scream. "Because Nick Boyle wouldn't have taken her organs."

He lifts Marissa's arms just as her head falls forward. Death makes her limbs heavier in Will's hands. He tests their placement on the antlers, and when he finds just the right position, Will pushes anew. The spines pierce and pop through the soft flesh on Marissa's arms. Blood splashes against Will's cheek and neck.

"You will need evidence."

Will stops. Lecter's right. He has nothing but his own DNA to offer.

“Here. I have it,” the good doctor nudges Will out of the way. He gently Marissa’s lips and gently brushes a bloody rock under her front teeth. “You’re doing so well, Will.”

“I don’t feel well,” he says. There’s blood on his hands, and something other than a scream is lodged in the back of his throat.

Lecter takes him by the shoulders, guiding him away from Marissa and the antlers and the blood, all the way back to Baltimore. Will is seated at Lecter’s table in front of a centrepiece fashioned from a stag’s head and Elyse Nichol’s body.

The ravens pluck at her hollow chest. Her lungs lay butterflied on the platter before Will.

Abigail smiles from the seat across from him. Her eyes are gray and dead. When she opens her mouth to speak, blood spills out over her lips and from the giant gaping wound in her neck.

Hannibal’s arm slides along the chair back as he leans down to pour wine into Will’s empty glass. His breath is hot against Will’s ear. “Are you a killer, Will?” he asks.

The answer is lodged in the back of Will’s throat next to Lecter’s fingers. They are standing in the forest on the outskirts of Will’s property, and the cold bites at Will’s exposed shoulders, calves, and feet. His breath comes out in stuttering puffs of white cloud. Tears well up in his eyes: he’s choking. Lecter’s strangling him from the inside, fingers crushing against his windpipe to secure something in his esophagus.

It’s over as soon as it begins. Will is back at Lecter’s table retching, and his stomach content spill across the place setting, sour and fetid and reeking of rotting meat. Abigail’s ear floats in a pool of vichyssoise.

“I trusted you,” he growls.

Lecter continues to loom over Will’s shoulder, having taken a seat calmly, coolly, in the chair next to him. “Not nearly enough. Perhaps if you had, you would not find yourself in your current predicament.”

“I’m coming for you.”

Silly, Will knows, to threaten a figure in dreamscape, but it still feels good, probably because Hannibal is so lifelike here.

“No one will allow it,” Lecter replies.

“I’m *free*. You set me free.”

“You will never be free. Even now your incarceration continues in different forms.”

“They can’t keep me here forever.”

Hannibal smiles. Will wishes it didn't look so real. His own subconscious is patronizing him. He feels hot and sick and spinning, but still, he leans over to the doctor. "When these charges are overturned, the second I get out of Bethesda, I will be gathering every shred of evidence, every available lead..."

"There won't be any evidence, Will."

Will's whole body starts shaking under the weight of illness. He hasn't felt this awful since before Baltimore. But it's not encephalitis this time: it's terror. He's terrified of the kinds of stories Lecter can concoct, terrified of finding himself locked away again. He can't go back to that hole in the ground, Baltimore. He *won't*.

The molten terror turns to lead inside him. Will stare hellfire at Lecter and goes deathly still. "I won't need any evidence for what I'll do to you if that's the case," he promises.

He wakes – chest heaving, heart hammering, sweat pouring, head pounding – to a still-dark room, alone and afraid and sick to his stomach. Fear clings to him, drains him, but it's not of Bethesda or Baltimore or even Hannibal. Will finds himself genuinely afraid of what he'll do if he gets out and can't put Hannibal away, but only because he's not really scared of what he'll do at all.

The Talking Cure

Chapter Notes

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The mask Will refers to is the same one Hannibal wears during his own stay in Baltimore.

"I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street

With my hair down, so."

~*The Wasteland* (II 132-133)

Chapter Seven: The Talking Cure

Therapy at Bethesda takes place in one of the old sitting rooms. Will's walked there by an orderly. His steps are gradually working their way beyond what his shackles allowed, but he still feels the phantom bite of cuffs on his ankles when he tries to lengthen his gait.

There's are two chairs waiting, empty: same size, same shape; same make, model, and colour. Lampman's at the fireplace. She greets him professionally and takes a seat in one of the chairs, but doesn't invite Will to do the same. He glances between her and the orderly for direction, but they're both just waiting patiently, politely. The choice is his then. Fine: he'll stand. Pace, actually.

(This is how his sessions with Dr. Lecter started too. Will digs his nails into his palm.)

Lampman doesn't waste her time with convention: not honestly or parodically. So Will's not greeted with "How are you feeling today?" or "What are you thinking?" She starts by commenting, "Dr. Chilton still hasn't sent over your list of medications, or the notes from your treatment."

Even for Chilton, that's impressive. It's been three days since Will left Baltimore: he knows because he asks Lindsey for the date every night that she sees him, and she has no reason to lie. Chilton must be employing every bureaucratic hurdle he knows to keep his

hands on Will's psych eval and related documentation. There's no profit if any other doctor gets to Will too.

"Do you remember any of Chilton's treatments?" Lampman asks. She looks at her notepad – writes the date and the time – instead of at him. Will's not sure what that means, but it sets him on edge...ier.

"He usually started by asking how I slept." When he wasn't asking about what Will remembered of his five murders.

"Is that a relevant question?"

Lampman's eyes are so large. He immediately wishes she would go back to looking at her notes. She's testing him. Or is she? Will can't tell. Lampman is insufferably blank.

He doesn't give her a second of eye contact. Just a shrug. "You're the psychiatrist. You tell me."

"I wouldn't deign to tell you anything," Lampman leans back in her chair. "I think you've spent enough time unnecessarily being told things."

"Letting the patients run the institution, Doctor?"

"This isn't an institution," and she believes that strong enough for both of them, because she doesn't even flinch when Will scoffs her. Lampman just continues, "Also, you're not a patient."

"What am I?"

"Why don't you tell me?" Lampman shrugs.

Will smiles bitterly. "Testing me, Doctor, is a shallow way to initiate therapy."

"Who said I was initiating therapy?"

"Again," he's really getting tired of this, "you're the psychiatrist. Not me."

Lampman finally gets that she's getting nowhere and changes her approach. She drops her pen on her notepad like a peace offering. "I don't think you need therapy."

"What do you think I need?"

"I think you need to understand your illness, clarify what you experienced during your blackouts," Will can feel her eyes creeping over him again. He tries not to shudder. "So much of your pathology can currently be explained by the encephalitis."

"You don't think I'm unstable."

"Not nearly as unstable as Dr. Chilton seems to think you are."

“But still unstable.”

“Frayed. Unraveled.” Will doesn’t bother trying to rebuke her. At least that’s what he tells himself. In truth, he just can’t find the words to do it. Lampman has the right idea.

She lets his silence settle between them for a few minutes, and then adds, “Your interpersonal skills could use some work too.”

Will laughs - bitterly at first, but then he realizes she’s actually making a joke. Lampman doesn’t give a damn about his interpersonal skills. No, scratch that: Lampman appreciates his interpersonal skills. She doesn’t see them as a manifestation of mental illness; she perceives them as a part of who he is. No changes necessary. Will’s laughter dwindles and then dies in an exhausted huff. He doesn’t know what to do with that, so he matches her humour with his own bleaker variety. “I don’t think I’ll need to improve my interpersonal skills.”

“Why not?” Lampman asks softly.

It’s the only subject Will wants to be honest about: “I don’t think I’ll ever need to use my interpersonal skills again.”

“You want to withdraw.”

“Withdraw is such a small word,” Will sighs, “I want to...disappear to the point of anti-presence.”

“What about the man who framed you?”

The silence that follows slices through him. Everything comes into focus: four wide windows looking out to an overcast sky, a damp field, and the Potomac; a den of cherry wood and teak, comfortable arm chairs, and a marble fireplace that hasn’t been used in decades. Sparse artwork. No books. Lampman is wearing something respectably middle-class and jewellery only on her wrists and hands (*because it’s hard for a patient to kill their doctor with jewellery like that*).

Will blinks and comes back to himself. He doesn’t remember why he’s still here, locked away, and when he does, he *hates* that he’s still here, locked away. Having one person believe that he is not insane doesn’t help when the man who put him in here killed Abigail Hobbs and is throwing lavish dinner parties with Alana Bloom in rapt attendance.

(Crawford doesn’t believe him. No one believes him. Lampman believes him only because she doesn’t know better.)

“What about the man who framed me?” he demands, the edge in his voice unmistakable.

Lampman doesn’t cut deeply though. She’s wearing the suit of armour every shrink school on the planet gives their graduates on convocation day. “I asked you first.”

Will arms himself. “A man kills five people and frames you so successfully that not only are you convicted of the murders, the courts sanction a quack psychiatrist to conduct electroconvulsive therapy on you without consent. What would you say about that person?”

(He shoots Hannibal that night in Minnesota without hesitation.)

“Highly intelligent. Motivated. Psychopath.”

“What would you do, Doctor?” Will wants to hear it. He wants his anger validated, wants his new nightmares justified.

(He shoots Hannibal that night in Minnesota without hesitation.)

“I would do whatever it takes,” Lampman replies. There’s an undercurrent of sadness in that admission Will feels like a knife in his gut. She knows. She doesn’t like it, but she knows, and that’s enough for now.

Will waits for the frantic scratch of pen against paper, for the buzz of psychiatric excitement at all the papers just waiting to be published. Nothing comes. He looks over to find Lampman’s staring out the window in the same direction that he is, only shifting her gaze when his eyes are in her direction.

“Sounds like you still have work to do,” Lampman comments. “Better not go disappearing just yet.”

Will stares at the floor. His palms hurt. He’s clenched his fists so hard, the nails have punctured his skin. “No,” he agrees, turning back towards the window. “Better not.”

Lampman shifts the rest of the conversation over to Dr. Chilton that first day. His methods, his questions, what Will did and didn’t like about his treatment at Baltimore. Will’s diction is clinical, but his tone is biting. There isn’t much he liked about his time at Baltimore, and Dr. Chilton is one of the things he liked the least.

He has no reason to lie about Chilton, so he tells Lampman everything. The early morning sessions in a concrete room where he’s chained to the chair. Chilton’s use of repetition, tape recordings, and endless note taking to clarify and the undermine Will’s statements. His idiotic attempts to jumpstart Will’s memory: hypnosis, invocations of evidence, having Will rebuild the crime scenes verbally, showing photographs of Abigail’s ear floating in his sink. Prescribing drugs for dementia and Alzheimer’s that made Will’s brain hum with energy. Hypnotics that sent his imagination soaring in whatever direction Chilton requested it to take.

The information comes out of him like he’s been rehearsing it. Will wants Lampman to unravel just like he is, wants her to write UNSTABLE in big capital letters on that still pristine notepad of hers. She doesn’t. Her eyes hold steady upon him, and she waits

patiently for him to finish speaking. Will can't stand it, can't stand her, can't stand not being able to see her, and that's when he mentions the mask.

"What mask?" Lampman asks.

Will breaks out in a cold sweat. "Like a half moon with a steel grate over the mouth," it's heavy on his cheeks. His hands start trembling. "To keep me from...biting."

Still nothing from Lampman. Will's whole chest aches. "Do you have the urge to bite people?"

"He wanted to know why I ate people," Will says. "This was just after the conviction."

"You felt the need to show him."

"I wanted to hurt him."

"So he hurt you."

"Masks don't hurt, Dr. Lampman."

"Not usually," she tosses her head, considering. "But you didn't get to choose your masks in Baltimore."

"I haven't gotten to choose my masks for a very long time," Will mutters.

He waits for more questions, the inevitable picking away at his consciousness. Lampman's eyes are creeping over the fabric in his mind again, but instead of prodding, she pinches down on the frayed edges to keep them from unraveling further.

"Time's up, Mr. Graham," she says with a small smile.

Will feels the wind die in his sails a little bit. "That's usually my line."

Lampman rises from her seat. "I'm glad you didn't have to use it today."

He laughs again and sounds sick to his stomach. Which he is. "It never works for me anyways."

Sinking Feeling

Chapter Notes

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I had to consult a website on fishing in Louisiana for the types of fish Will would have eaten as a child. Apologies if the species I listed are not found in the area. There is also some debate online as to whether amberjack is edible. I read that it was safe for consumption. I do hope this is the case. Please let me know if I am a terrible researcher!

"The nymphs are departed.
And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors;
departed, have left no addresses.
By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept..."
~*The Wasteland* (III 179-182)

"Nothing makes us more vulnerable than loneliness, except greed."
~Thomas Harris, *The Silence of the Lambs*

Chapter Eight: Sinking Feeling

The session with Lampman leaves Will feeling thick and drained simultaneously, like he's lost one thing only to sop up another. He goes back to his room and shuts the door, but then Baltimore's back, and so are his sessions with Hannibal, and so is his impatience – when is he getting out of here? Once again, Jack's disappeared just when Will needs him most.

Even with the curtains splayed, the room still feels windowless, dank, and dungeon-like. Will shuts his eyes, but the darkness looks like stone walls and iron bars. Hannibal Lecter stands outside the cell – free, victorious – and greets him, "Hello, Will."

He storms out of the room and doesn't blink until he's emerged outdoors, where the warm daylight banishes all his bad dreams. From his eyes, anyways.

Bethesda's fence is about the same height as Portland's. Not that Will's checking.

He's making another lap of the courtyard, overheated and annoyed, when Alana appears. She's carrying a bag of take-out in one hand. It's a toss-up as to what makes his head spin more: her or the food. Will's head is still in lock-up, so normalcy pulls the rug out from under him. He's reeling as she walks up then, lost in a flurry of wanting out, to go back, to get Hannibal, where's Jack, and what was the question again?

"I was told no visitors for the first week," Will says, "Not that I'm unhappy to see you..."

Alana smiles. "I pulled some strings."
"Showing up the first day of therapy? Those are some coincidental strings."

"You were in therapy today?" she looks just surprised enough to not be faking, but the tone of voice gives her away. No wonder Lampman let him leave the session in such a state. "I had no idea."

Will immediately retreats. "I don't want to talk about it."

"I wasn't going to ask."

The sounds of springtime fill the silence between them for a moment before Will thinks of something to say. "When am I leaving?"

Her smile fades slightly but is forced back into place. "Let's have lunch," Alana suggests.

Will sighs. "Not soon, then."

They take a seat on one of the shaded benches, Alana positioned at a friendly distance with the bag between them. Will smells fish, garlic, and starch for the first time in a long time, and it's enough to make him cry. He turns his head away quickly and scrubs his face to hide the tears on the edge of his vision and his quivering lower lip. When he looks back, Will watches Alana's face fall.

"I'm sorry," she pauses mid-reach into the bag.

Will shakes his head and scrubs his face again. "Don't be. I'm being ridiculous."

Alana moves the bag onto her lap and shifts closer to him on the bench. "You're not being ridiculous, Will. You've been incarcerated. Wrongfully."

"I'm tearing up over take-out."

"It's normal to be overwhelmed by things, no matter how small or banal they might seem."

"That and the food here is terrible."

It takes Alana a second, but she finally gets that he's making a joke, lame as it might be. "I thought you might appreciate fish," she hands him a warm take-out container and plastic utensils. Will takes them and flashes her a small, sad smile. He does appreciate it. More than he can or could ever express.

(He ate fish with his father: battered, fried, blackened, baked, broiled. Red snapper, grouper, amberjack, tuna.)

Will's hands are shaking as he pops the cardboard top from the aluminum container. He revels in the sight of perfectly cooked mahi mahi on a bed of rice and sautéed vegetables. The heat from it warms him even more than the sun does.

Alana waits until he's halfway finished before asking, "How are you, Will?"

He doesn't stop. The question doesn't bother him anymore. He has had more than enough time to perfect diversions, deflections, and distractions for responses. His answer for Alana comes quickly: "Who's asking? And why?"

"I am," she watches him carefully, drawing her own conclusions, "because I care about you."

"This isn't just a professional curiosity? You and Lampman collaborating to put me back together?"

"That would be unethical, Will."

"I know," he's lost his appetite suddenly. The fork falls from his fingers, and he rubs his face for the umpteenth time. "I'm sorry. I've been asked that question a lot. It's usually a preamble for discussions about how I felt murdering Abigail Hobbs."

"I just want to know," Alana chooses her words very carefully now that Abigail has been invoked, "*how* you are. A qualitative judgment instead of an emotional one."

"I will be a lot better when I'm out of here," Will says. His eyes dance around the courtyard, at the other patients dotting the greenery enjoying the day. "This isn't life: this is a morphine drip. This is palliative care."

"You're going to get out of here, Will."

"And then what? Back to being Jack's emotional bloodhound? Hannibal Lecter's psychological experiment?"

Alana sighs. "I shouldn't have asked."

"I shouldn't have said anything."

She shakes her head. "No: I'm sorry, Will." For a lot more than just the question, if her tone is any indication. "I'll stop talking."

“I like listening,” Will offers, directing his gaze towards her face. The closest he gets is her hands curled around the edges of her take-out container. “I just need to hear about something other than how I am or what I feel right now.”

“What would you like to hear about?”

The dogs seem like a safe topic; Will starts by asking about them. Alana updates him on the condition of all seven mutts and their behaviours. Her analytical mind is evident in her rhetoric. She even starts psychoanalyzing a few members of the brood at one point, providing an eloquent pathology and prognosis. Will takes solace in not being the only living thing Alana has taken to over-thinking. He feels a newer, stronger solidarity with his neurotic herd.

“I’ll bring one to visit next time,” she promises. “They’ve missed you, Will. We’ve all missed you.”

“Has Dr. Lecter missed me?”

Alana’s mouth hangs slightly open. She turns away from him, speechless and inert, and tries to regroup. Will feels bad but not bad enough to take it back. He’s switched on again, just like that, because if there’s people who miss him, it means that there’s a world from which he’s missing. A world he desperately needs to get back to in order to set things right.

“I don’t want every conversation we have to be a minefield, Will,” Alana says at last. She tries to catch Will’s eyes with hers, and he has to sink lower in his seat. “I understand that some topics will be...sensitive for you. But if you’d like to discuss something, I’d like it if you just said so. You don’t have to hide from me.”

“It’s not you I’m hiding from,” Will’s palm burns. He’s dug his nails into the skin again and reopened his wounds from the session this morning. He shoves the injured hand into his pocket, out of Alana’s sight.

She doesn’t notice. Or else she doesn’t comment. “You’re hiding from Hannibal.”

No. Yes. A thousand times, yes. Will cranes his face as far away from Alana as possible.

“Will, whatever we discuss here-”

(The shadow shifts between the trees and strafes slowly across Will’s periphery. He closes his eyes.)

“-I wouldn’t betray your confidence-”

(Hannibal stares at him from beyond the bars, smiling.)

“Do you want to talk about Hannibal?”

Will feels awake for the first time that day. "Yes," he continues watching the shadow in the trees. "How is Dr. Lecter?"

"He feels awful, Will. When they found Abigail's body, he immediately went to Jack to re-evaluate your case."

Lunch has turned to lead in his stomach. Will fumes. "He's all heart, Dr. Lecter."

Alana recognizes the barb for what it is. "You don't have to believe me," she says, "but I'm not going to talk about Hannibal if it's going to aggravate you."

The stalemate hurts more, somehow, than anything else Will has been through. He wants to talk about Hannibal. He needs to tell Alana about all the wicked things he came to understand in Minnesota. "Talking about Hannibal doesn't aggravate me," Will's tone is angrier and more biting than he intends, but he barely notices. "What aggravates me is how he has you and everyone else so hopelessly deceived."

She's wearing that expression again, the one from the interrogation room. The one from Baltimore. Alana's taken another bullet in the name of Will Graham. Her mouth sets into a hard, thin line. Will feels her anger, her own aggravation, but it's everywhere all at once: towards him, towards Jack, towards Chilton, towards herself, even a little towards Hannibal. Then, just as suddenly as it appeared, it's gone again, replaced by cool professionalism.

"If you have anything more to say about Hannibal Lecter," her voice is carefully measured now, "maybe you should tell him yourself."

Will's blood runs cold, a stark contrast against the heat of his fearful rage. "No one is going to put me in the same room as Dr. Lecter."

(He will make them regret it.)

Alana sighs. "He would like to visit you, Will. To apologize. To make amends."

"To gloat."

"I shouldn't have engaged with this," Alana folds the brim of her take-out container in preparation to pack up. "It's too soon for you, Will. You're still recovering."

"Alana."

Will forces himself to endure what feels like an eternity of eye contact. It's the best apology he can muster before he has to look back to her hands. "I was never very good at knowing what I should and should not say, and spending a month in solitary, maximum security confinement has only made that worse. I just...I don't have anyone," he stares at his own hand now, the one still gripping his lunch. The half moon scabs left by his nails throb. "You told me once to let my scream out? This is what my scream sounds like."

"Sounds desperate," she notes.

He chokes, tears budding in his eyes again. All he can do is nod. He stops when Alana's long fingers snake over his shoulder and give it a comforting squeeze.

"I'm sorry, Will. I'm sorry that I can't see what you see."

So is he, but hell if Will can articulate that. He has to scrub his face again. "I'm sorry I ruined lunch," he says.

"You didn't," she says, rubbing his shoulder.

They sit, listening to the quiet for a while, Alana rubbing Will's shoulder as his silent screams start to subside. He so wants to show her Hannibal, to point to the darkness between the trees and have her behold the evil that lives inside her mentor. Even Will knows that what's living in the trees is only in his head though. Hannibal has pulled the veil so thickly over her eyes, it's a miracle Alana can see anything at all.

His tears drying on his skin, Will helps her pack up, then walks her slowly back to the building. She promises to stop by tomorrow with a dog or two and asks Will what he would like for lunch. He tells her to surprise him, because he has no preference after Baltimore. Everything is an improvement over that menu.

Will stares through the glass entrance doors towards the parking lot as Alana slowly takes her leave. He is gripped by the sudden urge to run with her, to tear off into the daylight, head to Baltimore, and do something he regrets already, even without having done it. "Alana," he calls to her. For the second time that day, he looks her in the eye to apologize. "Tell Dr. Lecter-"

"Will."

"Tell him I want to see him."

She winces. "Let's see how you feel after a few more sessions with Dr. Lampman."

"A few more sessions isn't going to change anything. I want to see him."

Alana is unconvinced. "I will see you tomorrow, Will," she says.

"Tell him, Alana."

"Goodbye, Will."

The door hisses shut behind her. Will shuts his eyes against the hammer of the locks. Hannibal Lecter smiles at him through the bars of his cage.

Happy reading!

Insomniatic Panic

Chapter Notes

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I am in the process of moving, so this may be my last post for until later next week. Thankfully, I managed to type out two chapters for this fic before my brief hiatus. I look forward to continuing when I am all settled in my new place. Thank you, everyone! Enjoy!

"Who is the third who walks always beside you?

When I count, there are only you and I together

But when I look ahead up the white road

There is always another one walking beside you...

...who is that on the other side of you?"

~*The Wasteland* (IV 359-362, 365)

Chapter Nine: Insomniatic Panic

Will's awake for the first time since Hobbs's house. Really awake: heart pounding, blood pumping, body tingling kind of awake. He has to walk to keep from leaping out of his own skin, first in the courtyard and then in his room. The world's gone from hazy pastel to vivid technicolour, and the shadows in his periphery as rushing faster and faster.

(He can't close his eyes without thinking of Baltimore, can't keep them open without seeing Hannibal.)

His brain's oozing a heavy cocktail of adrenaline, serotonin, and dopamine. Panic and excitement and fear and aggression: Will bounces between them in a mad game of psychological pinball, because he doesn't know where he stands. He wants to see Dr. Lecter, but he is unprepared and knows it. The good doctor knows it too. He has to know it. He knows everything else there is worth knowing about Will: just enough to set him up and watch him fall.

Will skips dinner. Skips sleeping. Spends his time pacing and theorizing. He thinks Hannibal thoughts, but the design is hard to formulate without any known limits. Will knows Lecter killed Abigail, suspects that he had a hand in the previous victims, and is convinced there are more victims out there. Lecter's design defies Will's understanding though. The doctor's motives fluctuate depending on the victim and radically change course midway through their progression. What started as an effort to simply help Will see killers became an attempt to make Will into a killer himself.

(Lecter does not like to see his plans fail.)

The sound of knocking rouses Will from his thoughts. He turns to see Lindsey peeking her head through the door. "You're up late," she remarks. Every other night she's stopped by, Will has at least been in bed. Lindsey slinks her shoulder into the room but doesn't enter any further. "Everything okay?"

Will watches her with Hannibal's eyes. He doesn't appreciate colloquialisms – there are so many other fine words she could have used – but he finds her concern polite. She can keep her insides where they are for now. He nods to her imperceptibly, Lecter-like: "Yes, thank you."

She nods back, "You're a few minutes away from day four."

Just like that, Will's himself again. His posture shrivels, his head sinks low behind his curling shoulders, and he responds to Lindsey with a shaky nod. She flashes a small smile and slips her shoulder back into the hall. "Let me know if you need anything. Good night, Mr. Graham."

He can't catch his breath once she's gone. His legs feel hollow. Hannibal sees the world from such a lofty position. He stares down his nose at all of existence. The rude are cattle to him; they're animals lining up for the slaughter. Others are valued only for their uses, what Hannibal serves to gain from them. There's also a third category, undefined and elusive, for those minds that fascinate him. Those are the minds with which Hannibal likes to play.

(Wind them up, watch them go.)

Will has to sit down from chills. He's in the third category.

Hannibal is never going to let him go.

Lampman knows he didn't sleep and doesn't comment. She takes her seat the next morning, dates the open page of her notepad, and opens their session by saying, "Tell me what you did yesterday."

"I think you know what I did yesterday," Will replies. "Institutions - oh, no, *psychiatric hospitals* normally don't allow visitors within the first seven days of an

admission. Helps with the transition."

"Would you prefer that I conform to the practices of other psychiatric hospitals?"

Will's cheeks burn. He's so tired, and Baltimore feels so close. The loneliness, the isolation, and the darkness are palpable even standing in front of the wide windows. Hannibal wants him backed into a corner. He won't be happy to see that Will has options here, that Will's new psychiatrist wants to give him the benefit of the doubt.

Lampman changes the subject. She already knows the answer. "Are you transitioning, Will?"

"Do I need to transition?"

"Do you? What are you transitioning from?"

"I don't know," Will tries to lock Hannibal out of mind for a while. "Who I was before this is...muddled. Who I was at Baltimore is insufficient. Who I am now is..." he hears the phantom scratch of Chilton's pen against paper. Will glances over his shoulder to see that Lampman isn't even touching her pen. Her wide eyes shift between the view and Will as she negotiates his perspective with hers. "Don't you take notes?"

"I don't like to be distracted during sessions."

"Writing notes distracts you."

"Yes. I end up staring at the page, not the person."

Will bows his head under the weight of the word. "I don't feel like a person."

(Hannibal doesn't either.)

He expects Lampman to ask how he feels, but she doesn't. She skips ahead. "How do people feel?"

"Not like this," is the only answer Will can muster.

Another glance over his shoulder confirms that Chilton's only taking notes in his imagination. Lampman's eyes are trained on the Potomac, and her fingers are threaded together on an arm rest, notepad forgotten. "Why do you bring a notepad to your sessions if you don't take notes?"

"Occasionally I'm asked to write something down: a name, an observation, side-effects of a medication," Lampman catches Will's eyes for just a moment before he goes back to looking out the window. Her face holds no expectations, no ego, nothing. She's still water, clear as glass, and Will is frightened by how comforting that is. As if in response, Lampman breaks the silence. "I can take notes if that will make you more comfortable."

Will shakes his head. "I prefer that you don't."

(He wonder what notes Hannibal made after their sessions.)

“Leave no trace.”

Lampman’s voice walks a fine line between weight and levity. Will looks over his shoulder at her feet folded neatly in front of her chair.

“What would you write?” he asks somewhat masochistically. The psychiatrists he’s accumulated in recent memory would all tell him, but their notes tell Will more about them than they do about him. Hannibal’s notes are coldly diagnostic, observational but suggestive. They are the perfect expression of his character: outwardly professional, inwardly twisted and manipulative. Chilton, on the other hand, would delight in reading his vindictive notes aloud to Will. He was a schoolyard bully of psychiatry.

(Will had to give him some credit though: Chilton’s vocabulary was expansive. He never ran out of words to call Will crazy.)

“Probably my shopping list,” Lampman admits.

Will’s laugh is brittle; it crumbles in the air like sand.

“I had a visitor yesterday,” he tells her as if she doesn’t know, “and a decent meal for the first time in...” his mouth goes dry. Time is a difficult subject. “The first time in a while.”

Their conversation turns to fishing somehow after that; Will let’s it. When he walks out of the den at the end of their hour together, he realizes that he didn’t think once about Hannibal or Chilton for that length of time. That his raging headache is throbbing dully. That he’s sleepy instead of just exhausted.

He feels betrayed, usurped even. Two sessions and Lampman inside his head, pulling strings; she’s mapping out the ways into his mind so she can open him up and examine him.

Will has to bite down on his bottom lip to keep it from quivering. He’s not ready to face Hannibal again.

(He can’t go back to Baltimore: he won’t.)

Waving and Drowning

Chapter Notes

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The title of the story is taken from a poem by Stevie Smith called “Not Waving but Drowning”. It’s about a man who is drowning, but when he tries to call out to his friend, they think he is waving and do nothing. Will does both in different measure.

“Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not

Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither

Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,

Looking into the heart of light, the silence.”

~*The Wasteland* (I 38-41)

Chapter Ten: Waving and Drowning

Alana arrives at the same time as the day before with sandwiches in one hand and a leash in the other. Winston tugs steadily but not powerfully, because excited as he is, he knows better than to frazzle anyone. Especially Will, who looks even more exhausted than he did this morning.

(He’s been walking laps in the courtyard, half-expecting Hannibal to show up. The fence, he notices today, would be an easy climb, and all the orderlies are far enough away they couldn’t stop him if he tried.)

Winston buries his nose immediately into Will’s palm before sitting and tucking his head against Will’s bicep. It’s the closest approximation of a hug Will has ever received from a dog. He drinks the gesture into every fibre of his being: hands combing through Winston’s soft fur, scrubbing around the dog’s ears. Winston smells of damp earth, pine, and sweet grass, not quite home but close enough that Will closes his eyes and walks through the flat fields in Wolf Trap. His house is alight in the distance.

He trembles when rising, thoughts racing between Lampman’s endgame, Chilton’s methods, and Hannibal. Hannibal, Hannibal, Hannibal... Winston nuzzles Will’s palm again

and moans, rousing him from his panic. Will ruffles Winston's neck, "Alright, alright." He will worry later.

They eat, this time without much conversation. Will's too occupied with Winston anyways. The mutt sits with his head rested against Will's thigh. Will thinks he's looking for food at first, but Winston shoots him a surprised expression whenever Will offers him something. Whatever he's looking for, he's found it simply by being there.

Alana broaches the subject of Will's case without being asked. Jack's making some headway, she tells him, but Abigail's body hasn't exonerated Will in the eyes of the court for the other murders. "They won't find anything they haven't already," Will says.

"Do you remember anything?" Alana asks.

Will can't help but laugh lightly. Hers is a last ditch effort. They must be pretty desperate if she's asking him that. "I *know* I didn't kill them," he replies.

Her silence indicates that she believes him at least. Will takes comfort in that. The fact that they don't mention Hannibal once? Doubly so.

Will paces his room that night as well. Spends his session with Lampman being cryptic, monosyllabic, or just silent. He's about to feel bad for alienating her when she suggests a visit to their group therapy session afterwards. To get him acclimatized. Will isn't forced to sit in the circle and participate, but he is given a whole score of new perspectives to adopt. Neurotic, obsessive, mildly psychotic, eccentric: Bethesda is the human brain in front of a funhouse mirror.

He distracts himself by playing Hannibal again, by viewing the world from outside itself through a telescope. He winces when the nervous teen stutters his way through what he considers to be a good day; tunes out the minor victory of the pert, freckled redhead with OCD who turned her lights on and off only seventeen times this morning instead of twenty-five; and gets halfway through an elaborate murder fantasy involving the southern boy with a wicked tongue before he has to stop. He has to leave. He can't, he won't, he's not supposed to be here anyways.

Will hugs himself. The stories about Baltimore, about Minnesota, about Hannibal are clawing away at his insides. They're ripping and tearing and peeling him wide open. He closes his eyes and he's strapped to a chair in a concrete room as Chilton wonders aloud, "Just when were you planning on eating the rest of Abigail Hobbs, Mr. Graham?"

Lampman's fingers are brought to rest against his shoulder blade. He feels the apology in her touch, the gentle way she gestures for him to rise, the equally gentle way she excuses them from the room. She takes Will back to his room and sits him down on the side of the bed. A nurse – the linebacker one – joins them without being asked directly.

“We normally have at least one insomniac in residence,” Lampman watches as the nurse checks Will’s vitals. “How many days has it been?”

Will doesn’t want her doing the math. It won’t take a genius to figure out that their sessions plus Alana’s visits has resulted in his anxiety. Lampman’s already thinking about ways to change up his routine. He can feel her eyes darting back and forth across him. “This is the part where I tell you our time’s up, Doctor,” he says, glaring somewhere around her neck to give the illusion of eye contact. “Please, leave me alone.”

“His heart rate’s elevated,” the nurse informs her when he’s finished. “Temp’s up too.”

“Thank you, Neil,” he’s dismissed with a small nod. Will can sense him looming outside the door, though, even after he leaves.

“He doesn’t need to stay there,” Will comments, raising his voice so Neil can hear, “I’m not going to do anything.”

“He’s not standing guard,” Lampman’s a little distressed by his allegations, but she hides it well. “How many days has it been since you slept?”

Will’s secrets are clawing at the root of his tongue just threatening to spill over in one hysterical retch of word vomit. He shuts his mouth tightly to keep them inside. Alana doesn’t believe him; Jack still thinks he’s crazy. The best Lampman can do is humour him for a while. He searches his mind for the words that will make her go away instead. “I don't sleep well to beging with, and right now I’m transiting,” Will says. “It’s hard to sleep without the sounds of Christian television now that I’ve been in Baltimore.”

Lampman looks neither impressed nor convinced, but Will knows she has to believe him one way or another. He’s given her just enough of the truth to be convincing and withheld everything of importance. It’s a perfect binding catch-22 for Lampman: settle and she’s stuck with half-truths, grill him further and she will get outright lies.

Then again, she could always play her trump card. When he played games with Chilton, Will’s meds got changed, or the lights in the basement were turned on and off earlier or later than usual. Lampman is God in this place. She holds all the keys, gives all the orders, and she can find other ways to open him up than conversation.

She passes a request to Neil so quietly that Will can’t hear. He doesn’t ask for her to repeat herself though. Lampman walks slowly to the window of the room and stares out at the day beyond as Neil goes off to carry out her orders. Will knows where this is heading and grips the mattress tight enough to tear it.

“If I ask you about Baltimore, will you answer honestly?”

Will’s sure she’s asking him a trick question. “I don’t like psychiatrists,” he responds.

“Because of Dr. Chilton.”

“Because they’re psychiatrists. They all want to get inside my head. Tie strings around my thoughts and turn my psyche into a puppet.”

“Dr. Chilton is capable of many things, but I wouldn’t credit him with being able to get inside your head,” Lampman says.

Will immediately feels exposed. He opens his mouth to cover up, but Nail’s back in the doorway just as he’s about to begin with a cup in both hands: one with juice, the other with pills.

He is going to beg now. He doesn’t want to, not with all that’s happened today, but Will can’t help himself. “I don’t need to those,” he says.

“Just Aspirin, Mr. Graham,” Neil hands him the cups.

Lampman’s glancing at him out of the corner of her eye as he reaches for them. Evidently, this isn’t a game to her.

Will’s given a reprieve the next two days. No sessions with Lampman, no visits to group therapy: just a lot of time on his own wandering, visiting with Alana and more of the dogs, measuring the wall around the courtyard and the distance between himself and the orderlies. He receives Aspirin at regular intervals to keep his headaches at bay.

When there’s no session on the third day, Will has to ask. He questions Neil when he’s getting his morning round of Aspirin, anticipating animosity but receiving none. Neil’s perfectly affable. “I think she’s at a conference today, Mr. Graham,” he replies. “She has you scheduled back with her tomorrow.”

(Three days to rise again. Lampman’s practically biblical.)

He spends his morning sitting in the courtyard trying to figure her out instead of focusing on his previous psychiatrists. Lampman’s showed patience, understanding, and generosity for absolutely nothing in return. Will knows his trust isn’t worth as much as she’s giving him. Either she doesn’t give a damn, or she gives too much of one. Will doesn’t know what to do with either. He misses Chilton’s idiocy. At least he could run circles around that. Lampman’s too smart for any games he could play.

“Mr. Graham?” Neil arrives. “You have a visitor.”

Normally they don’t announce Alana. Will’s brow furrows. He turns to look back down the path towards his visitor.

His heart skips several beats and then plays catch-up. He feels the sweat bead on his upper lip, along his brow, and stream freely from his palms.

Hannibal Lecter stands behind him. “Hello, Will.”

Will's mouth is dry. His voice comes out in shards of broken glass. "Hello, Dr. Lecter."

Happy reading!

Between Scylla and Carybdis

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

Phew! It has been a busy week for me, and it will continue to be a busy month. I am looking forward to settling into my new place and job soon. Thank you for your continued readership! I hope this chapter has been worth the wait!

The title is an earlier iteration of the phrase 'between a rock and a hard place'. In Homer's Odyssey, Odysseus ends up between a monster called Scylla and a whirlpool (Charybdis). Will empathizes...and not just because he has an empathy disorder.

"Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit

Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit

There is not even silence in the mountains

But dry sterile thunder without rain"

~*The Wasteland* (V 339-342)

Chapter Eleven: Between Scylla and Charybdis

"We could walk inside."

"I'm fine."

He's not. His body is buzzing. Will doesn't know with what. Panic and rage are operating in pretty equal measure. He buries himself behind the collar of his jacket and then quickly unburies himself. Hannibal already knows whatever he's trying to hide. He says as much in the next breath with barely a glance in Will's direction.

"You're trembling."

"I wasn't expecting you."

"I understand if you are not prepared to visit with me," Hannibal's eyes weave over his skin like daggers, "Our last exchange was rather tense."

Will's mouth sets itself into a hard line. "Baltimore or the trial?"

"Both."

In both cases, Hannibal had sat on the outside of the cage and wove lie upon lie about Will's mental health, psychological status, and character. All carefully masked as passive observation, of course. Hannibal is just so much more believable than Will.

"Are you going to send me back to Baltimore?"

Will feels Hannibal mulling over his response as he would a fine wine. Not because he sees any reason to lie; only because he hasn't considered the answer. His reply is perfectly and characteristically double, as much one thing as it is another. "Baltimore is not my first choice of psychiatric facility," he allows himself to say. Will reads between the lines: Chilton is not Hannibal's first choice of psychiatrist. "Would it displease you to go back there?"

"Yes," Will says. There's no reason to lie.

"Because you don't deserve to be locked up or because of Dr. Chilton?"

"Both."

Hannibal's smile is invisible, but Will knows it's there, under his skin, along with the rest of him. "I had hoped that Dr. Chilton would, at the very least, remedy your delusions of persecution," the exasperation in his voice is tempered somewhat by the bitterness sharpening every consonant. Casual listeners wouldn't identify it, but Will can. Hannibal doesn't like that other people have been able to mistreat his things. "However, his decision to submit you for electroconvulsive therapy was careless and vulgar. A pity he was not treating you at full strength or in good health."

Will expects some barb about Chilton's intelligence but none is forthcoming. "What do you mean?"

"Dr. Chilton has suffered a severe relapse. His wounds from Abel Gideon succumbed to a long-standing infection. He has been re-hospitalized."

"Something he ate?" Will suggests acidly.

Hannibal doesn't take the bait, but the temperature between them enters free fall. "Injuries like Dr. Chilton's are prone to infections regardless of diet," the doctor's pause is significant. Will's ears perk up; his blood floods with fresh adrenaline. "Then again, one can never be too careful."

"Something you cooked," Will says lowly.

Hannibal's silence is as much a confirmation as it is plausible deniability.

(Will isn't ready for this.)

He's been making a point of staying close to the on-duty staffers populating the area, but that just seems to tighten the wrought-iron control Hannibal has over his own tongue.

They could go inside. Closed doors and privacy might tempt the good doctor into dropping his carefully crafted facade for just a moment. But then Will would be left alone with whatever monster lurks beneath Hannibal's well coifed surface, the same monster that got him wrongfully imprisoned and set the whole world against him.

He opts for a compromise then, taking a left at the fork with Hannibal following him towards the trees. They won' t be overhead from there but can be clearly seen by the staff members.

(The spectre in the shadows has vanished today and taken up residence in the good doctor's blood brown irises.)

Will glares at the sidewalk. "You can't keep pretending that what I know isn't real."

"What you know is highly questionable," Hannibal reminds him, "if not entirely doubtful. But I will humour you, Will: what is it you think you know?"

He sees the trap now that he's not fever blind. "Why don't you tell me what I know? You seem to know my thoughts better than I do."

Hannibal's eyes wander, searching for an audience. There isn't one. Will still feels him tightening up underneath his skin. "You believe that I killed Abigail Hobbs."

"I *know* you killed Abigail Hobbs."

"You believe that I have killed before."

"I *know* that you have killed before."

"Who have I killed, Will? Cassie Boyle? Marissa Schurr?"

"Dr. Sutcliffe, Georgia Madchen..."

Hannibal's lips have all the makings of a smile now. "You believe I am responsible for other unsolved murders as well."

"Cassie Boyle was not your first murder, and Abigail Hobbs won't be your last."

The smile broadens into a wicked, thin Cheshire grin. To everyone else, Hannibal just seems entertained by wild allegations, but Will feels the expression gnaw at his insides, confessing with every bite that *I will kill and kill again*. "Why would I commit these murders, Will?"

"You like committing murder, Dr. Lecter."

"Tell me who I am, Will," Hannibal dares him.

Will shakes his head. Fear and anger override his fine motor skills, so the action comes off looking like one of his tics. Still, his voice is steady when he demands, "You tell me who you are."

“I want to hear it in your voice, Will.”

“I’d much rather hear it in yours.”

They come to a halt just shy of where the path meets the trees, and the two men regard each other for a very long moment. It’s the longest Will has maintained eye contact with Lecter since Baltimore. His eyes sting, but he doesn’t bury himself from the strain. “Do you dream much, Will?” Hannibal asks without really asking. He already knows the answer.

“Sometimes I dream I’m you,” Will answers.

“What do you do in those dreams?”

“I apologize to Abigail before I kill her.”

“Because you feel sorry for her?”

“No,” Will says, “because I feel sorry for myself.”

Hannibal’s veil thins ever-so-slightly. For the first time, Will catches a glimpse of what lies beneath: a dark presence, neither human nor animal, but something in between. “Why kill her, then?” the doctor asks.

“Because she would expose me,” Will answers quickly. He only realizes his error a second later when Hannibal’s eyes start gleaming. “I mean...you. She would expose you. For Nicholas Boyle. But not...not just for Nicholas Boyle.” His imagination starts to spiral wildly. Jack Crawford would be hard pressed to believe her testimony that Lecter helped hide Nicholas Boyle’s body, but he wouldn’t be surprised to learn that she was sneaking off to visit Lecter late at night.

“There were others,” Will sees them – blurry at first and then clearly, “Others that she...knew about. That she...”

His next breath catches in his throat. He isn’t sure what sickens him more: that Hannibal has killed and will kill again, or that Abigail helped him do it sometimes.

(After everything, Hannibal had been more her father than Will could have ever aspired to be.)

Will has to stop himself. He has to bury his hands in his pockets to keep them from flying forward, has to swallow back the cries looking to punch their way out through his teeth. His jaw throbs against the fury of sound just aching to make itself known. Hannibal sent him to Baltimore (to Chilton and gospel music and lights on light off weak sick alone). Hannibal has killed at least five people (Cassie Boyle, Marissa Schurr, Dr. Sutcliffe, Georgia Madchen...) and Abigail...watched him? Helped him? Liked it? Enough that Hannibal couldn’t let her live when the FBI came to call.

(He apologizes because he couldn’t save her from herself, because of what the FBI intends to do to her, because she doesn’t deserve to die.)

“Should I call for assistance, Will?” Hannibal asks.

Will wants to call. He wants to scream it all out in one long confession. He wants to beat the disguise off Hannibal’s face, wants to see that black skin and horned creation that hovers in his peripheral vision. There’s no one to call who will offer assistance though. Will’s more unreliable now as a witness than he was in Baltimore, and he hates himself for it. He hates how tightly Hannibal has managed to lock him away: first in Baltimore, now inside himself.

Hannibal starts to turn for an orderly when Will’s fingers knot around his coat lapel. His voice emerges from beneath the deep, dark twisted curtains in his mind, down with all the monsters he’s collected over the years. He looks at Hannibal through Hannibal’s eyes and speaks to Hannibal in Hannibal’s voice. “That won’t be necessary, Dr. Lecter,” he says. “I’m fine.”

Hannibal wraps a hand tightly over Will’s wrist, but he doesn’t pull. He holds Will to him, binding them together. “You’re absolutely sure.”

(*I should have shot you when I had the chance.*)

“Yes,” he dies from having to say it, and no matter how many pieces of Will have died during his incarceration, this is the first time he’s felt alive enough to perish in recent memory. He’s been released from Baltimore only to find himself imprisoned by expectations orchestrated by Hannibal’s careful planning. He almost vomits when he says again, “Yes, I’m fine.”

“You dream of killing the other victims,” Lecter says, tightening his grip on Will’s wrist. He’s exploring. Like a child who’s just discovered that other people feel pain. “Tell me about those dreams.”

He’s not going to give Lecter the pleasure, not after giving up so much of his soul already. Will releases his grip on the doctor’s lapel. His wrist is released in return, and he returns the hand to his pocket. “Tell me how it felt to mount Abigail Hobbs’s body on a stag’s head.”

“You already know, Will,” Hannibal reminds him.

And it’s true: he already does. Will grieves for himself as he mounts Abigail’s fragile body atop the antlers. He doesn’t want to humiliate her this way, but she’s the only card left to play.

“You are not going to get away with this,” Will promises. He’s still finding it hard to speak with his jaw cramping up. “They are going to let me out of here eventually.”

“I don’t doubt it,” Hannibal says pleasantly. “In fact, I am looking forward to your release.”

“I’m coming for you, Dr. Lecter.”

“Of course,” his excitement is intoxicating in that moment. Will is swept up into the dark, slick gleam in his eyes and lost amidst a sea of sweet anticipation. Hannibal has missed him. It has taken every ounce of the doctor’s not unsubstantial self-control to stay away, to bide his time, to wait for an invitation. “I feel, however, that I must warn you. If only out of respect to our friendship,” Will tastes bile at the sound of the word. Hannibal’s eyes smolder. “I am very difficult to catch, Will.”

“Then out of respect to our friendship, Dr. Lecter,” he is going to be sick the second Hannibal leaves, “I am very difficult to stop.”

The sight of Lecter’s smile is enough to make Will attack. He knows exactly what that smile means now: he wasn’t so difficult to lock away the first time. Hannibal can and will do it again. The thought of Baltimore sobers Will somewhat, keeps his fists buried in his pockets and his scowl from jutting across his face. The saner he appears right now, the harder it will be for Lecter to put him away again.

(He hopes.)

“The staff is more suspicious of visitors than the staff at Baltimore,” Hannibal notes, though Will hasn’t seen his eyes move in the slightest. He turns back towards the building. “I wonder what the turnover rate is for employees.”

“Faster now that you’re here,” Will chides as they begin to walk back towards the building.

“Dr. Chilton has already done sufficient damage to your psyche, and I do not want your release impeded any further. The staff of Bethesda may keep their job security.” Hannibal’s posture changes slightly now, just enough that an itch breaks out under Will’s skin, “This Dr. Lampman is intriguing though.”

He tries to hide how defensive he becomes by sounding casual. “I don’t find her that interesting.”

“As I recall, you didn’t find me interesting either.”

“That was before I knew you,” Will growls. “You have my full and complete interest now.”

The monster under Hannibal’s skin settles contentedly. All is right with the world.

They make their way slowly towards the building. Their silence speaks louder than words. Will is a billowing rustle of storm clouds, thunder and lightning and kinetic energy. Meanwhile Hannibal is cold metal buffered until transparent, but the storm clouds brewing on the surface aren’t a reflection of Will. He’s as much a storm as his companion; he’s just better at hiding.

“I’m sorry to cut our visit short,” Hannibal says when they reach the door, “but I’m afraid I’m having company for dinner tonight.”

“Give my regards to Alana,” Will mutters glumly. She will sit at Hannibal’s table and love every second.

“Dr. Bloom will not be joining me tonight. Some colleagues are attending a conference in Baltimore today.”

Will’s blood goes cold. “A c-conference?”

The stutter is unintentional. He wishes he had been more careful. Hannibal notices. “Yes. I’ll be entertaining tonight. Perhaps I will bring you some leftovers tomorrow, if you’d care to see me.”

There’s not enough room in his chest for air or maybe there’s not enough air for him to breathe. Conference, colleagues, leftovers, Hannibal, killing...he hasn’t seen Lampman for two days. Will’s mouth hangs open, throat dry, caught between anger and terror.

“Good day, Will.”

Hannibal walks briskly through the building towards the exit: comfortable, secure, *victorious*. Will can only watch him go. Saying or doing anything else will only confirm his diagnosis and extend his time at Bethesda.

“Everything okay, Mr. Graham?” Neil asks.

“Where is Dr. Lampman today?” he demands.

“A conference.”

“What city?”

Neil shrugs. “Baltimore.”

Will feels faint. His eyes roll back in his skull. He scrubs his face to keep from passing out. “I need a phone,” he blinks rapidly, focusing up for the task at hand. “I need a phone *now*.”

Happy reading!

When the Levee Breaks

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

Well, the good news is that I finally have the internet again!

The bad news is I'm back to work, and it sounds like I have a hectic couple of weeks ahead. I'm going to try and update every week to ten days, but I apologize if I fall a little behind. The new school year waits for no one. Thank you for your kind readership and lovely reviews! It's a pleasure knowing you're out there. I hope you continue to enjoy the updates.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"But at my back in a cold blast I hear

The rattle of bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear"

~*The Wasteland* (III 185-186)

"Now, cryin' won't help you, prayin' won't do you no good,

When the levee breaks, mama, you got to move."

~Led Zeppelin, "When the Levee Breaks"

Chapter Twelve: When the Levee Breaks

Neil is very accommodating. Then again, Neil thinks Will is having a panic attack, which he is, just not for any reason the nurse might suspect. They head to the impromptu nurse's station nearby, where Will's handed the receiver. Neil dials Lampman's cell first, then her home. She doesn't answer either.

"She said she would be unreachable during the sessions," Neil explains. "Dr. Shepherd is on staff today. Would you like to speak to him?"

Will gives Crawford's number in response. His vision tunnels in the time it takes Jack to answer, and Neil has to tell him to calm down twice. He doesn't realize he's been holding

his breath until he tries to speak.

"Jack."

Crawford's tone is fresh from a crime scene. "Not a good time, Will."

(He can say that again.)

"Jack," Will struggles not to think about murder, "you need to go to Dr. Lecter's house right away."

The empty air is allowed to stand just long enough for Will to recognize that he's being warned. Jack's mentally counting to ten. "I'm going to give you a minute to think about whether you want to tell me that again."

Will's thoughts are in a jumble. He grapples with all the words on his tongue, searching for the right ones. The only explanation he thinks he can offer without sounding crazy is, "Dr. Lampman's not answering her cell phone. She could be dead already."

So much for not sounding crazy. Jack sighs inaudibly before asking, "Are they medicating you, Will?"

"Look, I know how this sounds, but I'm not being paranoid or hysterical."

"It certainly sounds like that to me." From the look on Neil's face, that's exactly what it sounds like to him too. "You need to get a handle on yourself. Whatever you think about Dr. Lecter is based on a fever dream, Will."

"No! No: I was thinking clearly in Minnesota. I was thinking clearly in Baltimore, and I am thinking clearly now. Dr. Lecter is killing people, and he may have just killed my psychiatrist."

"I'm hanging up, Will."

"Jack-"

"WILL," Jack's using every ounce of strength not to lose his temper. He`s just guilty enough to not yell at Will this soon after Baltimore, but not guilty enough to give any credence to his ramblings. "Just get some rest. Take it easy. Let them give you something besides Aspirin. I'll have Alana come by, alright?"

"Her blood's on your hands!" Will snaps.

He slams the receiver back onto the cradle. Neil allows one of his brows to rise but doesn't say anything more. He changes the subject instead. "I'm sure Dr. Lampman's fine," he offers sternly, "You should sit down, Mr. Graham."

Will can't sit down. His imagination is blazing. Hannibal's insinuations have reignited the fire in his right hemisphere, and he's lost amidst the endless cruelties Lampman might be suffering and what he can do to stop it. All the while, Hannibal's perspective vies for

attention. Will drifts between his own thoughts and Lecter's so fluidly that he loses track of where he is until Neil puts a hand on his arm. "No, no," Will's anger burns hotter. He hasn't felt this mentally ill since Minnesota. "I have to do something."

"I'll keep trying Dr. Lampman."

"It's too late for that! If she's not answering her phone, than he already has her!"

(The saner he gets, the less sane he sounds.)

"Okay," Neil sounds so convincing. He must practice that acquiescent tone in the mirror. "Who else can I call for you?"

There's no one else, but Will doesn't want to admit it. He needs there to be someone who will make this alright. His list of available allies are exhausted though. Jack doesn't believe him, Alana won't listen, Price and Zeller are still convinced that he's guilty, and Bev...no, he can't call Bev. Hannibal will chew Bev up and spit her out just for the fun of it. Will is an army of one against a cult of personality.

He reaches for the phone again. "Put me on the line with Baltimore P.D."

Here Neil adopts a hard stance. "I can't do that, Mr. Graham."

"Dr. Lampman is in danger."

"You don't know that for certain."

"You don't know that she's not!"

An orderly flanks him. Will's whole body goes rigid instinctively. He knows where this is headed: twisted limbs, blunt force trauma, restraints, sedation, solitary confinement, that *mask*. They'll bar the door, brick the window, and blare gospel music on repeat until his ears start bleeding. "I'm sorry," Will says quickly, his tone unhinging despite his efforts. He extricates himself from Neil's grasp. "I'm sorry."

For the second time in a day, Will pretends that he is fine. He is in agony through the performance, so he makes it quick. He slows down his breathing just enough for the orderly to back off, he apologizes again to Neil, rambles about forgetting himself and so on, then walks back to his room.

He wants, more than anything, for this to all go away. He wants to cut out the parts of him that feel Lampman's fear as her heart stops beating, the parts that understand and even admire Hannibal's chilly aloofness, his separation from all things. He wants to go back in time and *see* from the beginning. Maybe then it would have been Hannibal behind bars, and Will could bid him a victorious farewell.

The courtyard is empty and gray outside his windows. Clouds are sweeping in from over the trees, sending his fellow inmates back indoors. The whole world is plunging, rather fittingly, into shadow, and Will's thoughts turn from self-wallowing to self-motivating. His

eyes scan the scene for Bethesda staffers or other stragglers, but there are none. Everyone's back inside in anticipation of a storm.

They aren't going to let him outside after his near breakdown. In fact, Neil probably won't let him out of his room. They're on their way now, Will can feel them, with chains and fists and needles. He scrubs the cold sweat off his face to clear his head. He's rewarded with the sounds of Lampman shrieking and the frosty chill of Hannibal's demeanor. His incredible imagination elaborates both to grandiose proportions.

(He has no referent for Hannibal's sadism, so Lampman dies in a hundred or so gruesome ways that Will invents all by his terrified, disgusted self.)

Thunder rumbles overhead, interrupting Will's fantasies. He couldn't stop Hannibal from killing Abigail, but he can try and stop Hannibal from killing Lampman. He bars the door with a chair and heads for the window.

By the time the orderly breaks into the room, Will is gone.

He avoids the fence facing the street and races towards the tree line. His peripheral vision whirls with spectral shadows, but Will doesn't care so much anymore. Hannibal is en route to Baltimore for blood and fine dining, not lurking about in Bethesda's overgrowth.

(Unless this is precisely his design.)

Will skids to a halt. His fingertips brush wet metal. There's a chain link fence hidden inside the thicket just far enough that Will couldn't see it from the courtyard but not so far that he can't be seen by the staff. He turns back to get his bearings, and the trees follow in his vision at odd angles. Hannibal wants to see what he'll do under the proper duress. The doctor's hints could easily be a ruse to goad Will into doing something *crazy*. And weak as his social skills are, Will knows that climbing the fence, calling the cops, hitching to Baltimore, and crashing a dinner party fall pretty squarely into that category.

He could stay at Bethesda. He could play by the rules. He could pretend tonight was a poor lapse in judgment and return to his room like a well-trained pet. Take his meds, get some rest, wake up tomorrow and tell Lampman all about it when she shows up at work, unharmed.

(Even if they pull Lampman's body off a stag head tomorrow, no one will fault Will for turning back.)

His jet-skinned apparition chitters and flickers on the fringes of his vision though, and Will whips round to greet the monsters instead. He can't go back, not when there's the chance that a life is at stake.

Fences come easily to him. Will's fingers dive though the links, his toes find purchase, and he scales, up and over, knuckles white from straining against the rain. His feet touch the ground on the other side just as the orderlies storm the courtyard, and Will runs before they can catch sight of him.

The shadow follows: slow at first, but it grows faster and faster until its right alongside him. Will tries to not look. Tries to tell himself that he's alone. He came here alone and he's running alone. His mind is playing tricks on him just like Hannibal is playing tricks on him.

(...wind him up watch him go wind him up watch him go...)

He's going as fast as he can and it's not fast enough. The rain is washing the trees into great streams everywhere Will tries to turn. The world's a cage of black ribbons that pull taut into bars. He pushes against them to gain momentum, but his legs turn to lead from the exertion. They haven't run in a very long time.

Beyond the hush of rain, Will gradually becomes aware of the crackle of insect legs. Exoskeleton beating against exoskeleton for momentum. He whips around at last to face Abigail's killer, but the shadow flickers into the far corner of his left eye. Will turns again and again and again until the dizziness leaves him reeling, fumbling for trees to stay upright.

"Dr. Lecter?" he taste bile, but his nausea is overwhelmed by an ache in his chest. Something shifts in the brushes behind him. Will pivots towards the source of the noise only to find nothing but a blur. No matter how much he blinks, the world is a haze of grays, blacks, and blues. The ground and the sky keep switching places. He drives a hand into his chest against the rising crest of pain. "Dr. Lecter!"

Will's only response is the sound of his own whimpering. Everything's caught in a dense haze. He isn't perceiving reality anymore, and as if knowing isn't bad enough, there's nothing he can do about it. He claws at the trees for purchase, but his fingers have gone numb. He's dying: he must be. Only death could feel this terrible.

Long, jagged fingers curl around his bicep. Will's ears burn from the rustle of insect wings. He thrashes around until his fist meets flesh, but then he's being attacked by a black-bodied assailant whose visage flickers between Lecter and the wendigo and a faceless spectre. Will tries to keep up, but the blood in his arms and legs has gone cold. He staggers back and back and back, landing heavily against a tree.

His legs give out underneath him. Will stares up into the blank expanse of face looming over him. Lecter leans forward, the wendigo reaches for him, and the ghost of Georgia Madchen's nightmares gently removes his glasses from his face.

The last thing he feels is a hand on the back of his neck positioning his head between his knees, and then everything goes black.

Chapter End Notes

I was doing my darndest to depict Will's panic attack at the end of the chapter with every modicum of realism. Alas, I got carried away with the imagery from the show. I hope that the scene is not flowery, and that your willful suspension of disbelief remains intact.

Happy reading!

Coma White

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

Only three more weeks until the Blu-ray release. I can hardly wait. Thank you, everyone, for following along! I hope this next installment sates you!

The title is from one of my favourite Marilyn Manson tracks, which popped into my head halfway through writing this chapter and refused to leave. Just as well: the song has to do with drugs, numbness, salvation, and death.

"Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?"

~*The Wasteland* (II 126)

Chapter Thirteen: Coma White

Only a fraction of Jack's face is visible through the crack between the door and the frame. The image swims, but he exudes solidity nonetheless. His face is a stack of hard lines and his eyes are brick walls. Will feels locked out and drawn in at the same time. He has to look away to remind himself where he stands. He's definitely on the outside of Jack's better nature right now; the young agent standing in front of Jack has interiority. Will recognizes her as the powder keg with a trigger finger that nearly killed him on his first day at Bethesda.

(She's wearing seafoam Converse and yoga pants under her tailored coat. Either she's been staking the place, or Crawford caught her right in the middle of a quiet afternoon cleaning her knife, gun, and explosive collection. The former is more likely; Will's saliva curdles in his throat.)

There's a gap in his memory where the walk back from the trees should be. Will hasn't tried looking for it. Crawford's warming up for a lecture that Will doesn't want to hear. He's discontent already. He doesn't need to be told why or, worse, why he shouldn't be.

Bethesda's examination room is already claustrophobic. When Jack enters, Will feels the walls close in like a rawhide on his skin. Alana's presence does nothing to alleviate the pressure. She appears from nowhere, face flushed (with worry instead of screaming), coat folded over her hands. Her mouth starts moving, but not a sound reaches Will's ears. He stares at the floor and mouths the words, "Go away."

The door shuts with a sharp thud. "WILL." Jack's voice. Apparently, he can hear again. "Are you with us?"

"Will," Alana's voice runs through him like cool water. He responds without intending to by tilting his head just slightly in her direction. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"It doesn't matter what he wants, Alana."

She doesn't look away from Will. "Would you tell us what happened?"

Will is silent. He can't, for so many reasons, not the least of which is that *no one believes him*.

Jack is holding back. The steel in his stare in the only thing holding back the inferno of his temper. "Just what exactly did Hannibal Lecter say to you this afternoon?"

"...doesn't matter."

"What?"

Will enunciates every consonant. "It doesn't matter."

"Yes, it does matter!" All that resolve is gone now. Jack blazes. Will's cheeks burn from the inside out. "You called me at a crime scene to say that Dr. Lecter murdered your psychiatrist. and then you hopped a fence, fled the facility, and assaulted a federal officer."

"He was having a panic attack," Alana says forcefully.

"All the more reason for him to tell us: what did Dr. Lecter say to you, Will?"

Will's mouth fills with grit and ash. Lecter speaks to him in languages Jack couldn't begin to understand. "He said...he said Dr. Lampman intrigued him, and that he was having dinner with some colleagues." His laugh, bitter and ragged, emerges despite his best efforts. He knows how unstable he sounds already; the laugh is a signed confession of insanity for Jack.

Alana does her best to maintain a supportive expression, but Jack is beyond unimpressed. He is livid, taut, ready to snap. "He said Dr. Lampman intrigued him and that he was having dinner with colleagues," the tension in the room rises with every syllable. He gives Will scant milliseconds to add more before snapping, "That's all."

Will's tone grows harsher to meet the strength of Jack's. "You don't know Dr. Lecter like I do."

"I don't know anybody like you do, Will," Crawford agrees, both aggressive and defeated in the same instant. He lets his exhaustion overwhelm his temper for a brief moment and settles into an uncertain silence. Will sees the remorse in his stance. "I don't even know you anymore."

"I'm the same person."

“No, you’re not the same person. The Will I knew needed evidence to draw his conclusion. He needed facts. There’s no evidence to suggest that Dr. Lecter is anything other than who he appears to be.”

Will tears at the cushion of the table he’s seated on and wishes it was Lecter’s face in his hands. Hannibal all but confessed to him this afternoon; he paraded his true form through the courtyard in plain sight. No one but Will can see him though. “He knows the cases,” Will says frustratedly.

“A lot of people know these cases,” Jack counters. “Freddie Lounds bribed good cops for intel, but you’re not accusing her of murder.”

Lounds is a distraction. Jack hangs her name on a hook and waits for Will to bite. He doesn’t. He stays on Lecter like an arrow. “He withheld information about my health.”

Alana, naturally, leaps to defend her mentor and says, gently, “He wasn’t sure what was wrong with you, Will. None of us were.”

“You weren’t exactly in a position to know what information Hannibal was or was not aware of either,” Jack adds.

The implications rattle through Will and cause the fault lines creasing his psyche to crumble. “If my suspicions were a side-effect of the encephalitis they would have disappeared with treatment.” Alana opens her mouth to add something, but Jack’s silence speaks louder to Will than anything she might say. “Unless they aren’t a side-effect of the encephalitis. Is that why I’m here, Jack? In part to fulfill some bureaucratic formality to the criminal justice system, but mostly because you think I’m unstable?”

Jack’s eyes flit away just for an instant, because Will has lain some awful part of him bare. “I’m not unstable,” he says, hating how defiant he has to be in order to sound like he’s telling the truth. “I wasn’t unstable then either.”

“Maybe unstable is a poor choice of word,” Alana remarks. “Your experiences have clearly affected you, Will.”

“My experiences have clarified me,” he corrects her.

She hesitates, choosing her next words carefully. “Did you ever talk about Hannibal in your sessions with Dr. Chilton?”

His imagination fills in the next part of their dialogue: his wondering why, Alana’s evasion and suggestion, his feeling cornered, her reassurance, until he mentions that yes, he did mention Hannibal to Dr. Chilton and she draws the wrong conclusion. “You think Chilton put me up to this.”

Will immediately feels short of breath. Chilton is guilty of so many crimes against Will’s humanity, but defaming Dr. Lecter isn’t one of them. “Dr. Chilton tried his hardest to disabuse me of my suspicions about Hannibal. He thought they were,” he laughs again,

“impediments to my psychological recovery. That it was a defence mechanism to keep from remembering that I had murdered five people.”

“Is it possible that Dr. Chilton’s interference caused you to strengthen those beliefs?”

He immediately stops laughing. Dr. Chilton’s incompetence is no longer funny. “This isn’t a defense mechanism.”

“You were wrongfully incarcerated, Will,” as if she needs to say it again. As if he needs it branded on his forehead so that people will just know.

“What happened in Baltimore?” Jack demands.

(The trees in the forest looked so much like bars that even with the rain, he still felt imprisoned by them. Even closing his eyes and reminding himself that it wasn’t real doesn’t help.)

“I don’t suspect Dr. Lecter of murder because of what happened in Baltimore!” Will snaps. “Why are you both so quick to defend him?”

“You were very sick,” says Alana patiently.

“You might still be very sick,” says Jack impatiently.

Will’s hands ache from tearing now. He has to let go of the cushion.
“You can’t have it both ways! Either I was physically ill then, healthy now, and Dr. Lecter is a murderer, and I have been and still am mentally ill.”

Jack inhales deeply, preparing himself. “Dr. Lampman is en route from Baltimore as we speak, Will. She cancelled her dinner with the key note to come back here.”

He keeps talking, but Will stops him. He’s stammering, frantic, “No. No! He was threatening her!”

Wasn’t he? Will remembers his conversation with Hannibal so clearly. The doctor’s farewell appears, in Will’s memory, as a thinly veiled threat. He wanted Will to know that he intended to hurt Dr. Lampman. There’s no reason for him to bluff.

The realization dawns on him that the discrepancy was the point of all this, and Will’s anger disintegrates rapidly. Hannibal said exactly what he needed to hear in order to send him running. Now, it seems all the more plausible that Will’s vendetta is a sign of his instability more than validity.

“This is my design,” he stares at the ceiling, seeing Lecter’s plan so clearly in his mind that it hurts. “He still wants me to appear insane.”

Jack’s eye roll is audible. “I can’t listen to this.”

“He wants you to distrust me,” Will laughs again. “That’s what this was all about.” He might be free from Baltimore, but he’s not free from Lecter. Distrust is only useful when

Will's not being permanently damaged as a result.

"This is a delusion, Will."

His voice takes on a wicked lilt. "You're the one who's deluded, Jack."

Jack doesn't bother slamming the door when he leaves. Will should be bothered, but he isn't. He stares at the vacant arch of the doorframe instead of Alana, releasing a breath he didn't know he was holding. "I'm not crazy," he offers. His voice is soft for her now, because of all his chances, she's the best.

She's about as tired as Jack is though, maybe more, and the only thing stronger than her regard for Will is her regard for Hannibal. She gives a partial nod in partial agreement. "I know, but you're not well, Will."

His whole body aches from the tension in his muscles, "No: I'm the only one who is."

Alana's sadness and pity flow through him. Will closes his eyes and wishes the floor would swallow him up. "Am I being transferred?" If the answer's yes, he doesn't want to know, but he doesn't have the strength to tell Alana that.

"That's up to Dr. Lampman. Do you think you should be transferred?"

Will's heart leaps up into his throat. His voice trickles thinly through the air, "I don't want to go back to Baltimore."

"What happened in Baltimore, Will?"

(*chainscolddarkwronghomeAbigail*)

His lips curve into a sad, trembling smile. He doesn't want to give Hannibal the pleasure of hearing about his misery from Alana. She is about to ask him again, more forcefully this time, when a male doctor steps in with Neil at his ankles.

Will's smile fades. He chokes back a sob. Two little suggestions is all it took for Hannibal to unravel him again. "I'm not crazy," he doesn't mean to say it out loud, but once he starts, he can't stop. "I'm not crazy, I'm not crazy, I'm not crazy..."

Alana is at his side, hand on his shoulder. "Nobody is saying that you are," she rubs his arm the way he would calm a nervous dog.

The doctor checks his chart. He says something cordially passive-aggressive about Will's misbehaviour, makes a note, and holds out a small cup of pills. Will recognizes them immediately and shakes his head. "I'm not going to run away again," he promises.

"I know," the doctor replies, giving the cup a small shake. "Orally or intravenously: I have other patients I need to see."

He looks to Alana, but no matter how desperate she is to support him, she sides with her profession and says, "It's okay, Will."

No, it's not. Will glances back at the capsules with fear and loathing. He doesn't want to get lost in his own mind – not now, not ever again. "Am I being transferred?"

"That's Dr. Lampman's decision," the doctor informs him.

Alana squeezes his shoulder. "Do you want to be transferred, Will? Somewhere outside of Maryland?"

"No," Will says, "No, I don't." He remembers himself beyond the wretched anxiety trying to claw its way out of his chest. He's not crazy, but Lecter is working very, very hard to make sure everyone thinks he is. Will has to stay close and get sharp if he's ever going to be free. That means ingratiating himself here as much as possible, no matter how much it hurts.

He steadies his lower lip and takes the cup of pills from the doctor, hand still shaking.

(Abigail's cheek is warm under his fingers, the mask is heavy on his cheeks.)

Will tries to brace himself with thoughts of Hannibal. Thoughts of vindication. Vain promises that the dreams won't be so bad this time, that he'll control them, that it will be Hannibal behind bars this time and him smiling victoriously from the outside.

It won't be, and it isn't, but thinking so lets Will swallow his pride and the pills.

(*I'm coming for you, I'm coming for you, I'm coming for you*)

Happy reading!

Hypoxia

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

I am truly indebted to all of your kind support and readership for this fic! I have been in survival mode these past two weeks from work; writing is providing me with a welcome reprieve. Thank you for your patience!

"I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,

It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said...

The chemist said it would be alright, but I've never been the same."

~*The Wasteland*, (II 158-161)

Chapter Fourteen: Hypoxia

Will has just enough time to be walked back to his room before the pills kick in and the whole world slip slides out of sight. He's intermittently aware of voices and hands, of dry clothes and starched blankets. Alana clutches his hand. He tries to hold on, but Baltimore has trained his grip to loosen. Reality passes through his fingertips, and he lets it go, sinking into the abyss.

Light erupts from the ceiling. Will doesn't even blink anymore. He hasn't been sleeping anyways. His body is cramped from cold and a metal bed frame: just another day at Baltimore's Psychiatric Hospital for the Criminally Insane. The guards' voices bellow up from the wells in his imagination, shapeless but demanding. Will doesn't need to hear the words to know what he has to do. He stands facing the back of his cell, is shackled, and walked slowly out of the cell block.

Will could walk this route with his eyes closed. Twenty paces, right, up three steps, left, fourteen paces, stop. Wait for the locks inside the steel door to open. The smell of musty concrete and damp burns at Will's sinuses. Chilton is waiting for him, file folder open in his hands. He reads from several of Lounds's articles while the guards secure Will's shackles to the floor by his chair. Chilton smiles like the cat who's just found the biggest bucket of cream. He closes the file, "I risk sounding cliché, Mr. Graham, but I really must know how that make you feel."

Will's hate is a real, living thing inside of him. "I don't feel anything."

Chilton's smile widens. He takes his seat in the plush chair across from Will. "You didn't sleep again last night."

Whatever he says is immaterial. Chilton draws his own conclusions, and sends Will back underground. He has a new neighbour in the cell next to him when he returns.

Lights out. Lights on. Back of his cell. Twenty paces, right, up three steps, left, fourteen paces, stop. Chilton waits for him. His mouth moves but Will doesn't hear anything except the doctor's smile, loud and grating. The underground is filled with chatter from the cell next door. His neighbour is talking to the bricks in the wall. Apparently, they resemble the two preteen girls he butchered and cased in concrete. Love and carnage spill out through the bars in his cage and sop against Will's feet.

His meds change that night. Will doesn't notice until after he takes them. The lights are suddenly on again and there are more meds waiting. "I'm not taking those." If only saying that made it true. One guard twists his arms round his back while the other pries open his mouth and shoves the capsule inside. Will swallows because they won't let him breathe until he does.

Lights out. The chatter next door entrances Will. The quavering syllables weave symphonies on the air. A spectral Abigail stands preserved just beneath the surface of the stone. Lights on. Will, still fighting, is given more meds. No walk to Chilton today, just a long time spent in the company of that voice. "I love you...I love you...I love you..." Fight, meds, lights out. Lights on. More meds. No Chilton again. His mind starts opening up to the man next door. Love for the girls in the walls, because he used the concrete blocks to build a wall of his own that could contain all three of them for eternity.

The floor twists and spirals under his feet as he walks. He arrives at a melting room, is strapped to his chair, and Chilton asks him about the man in the cell next door. Will speaks in a cadence and diction borrowed from his neighbour. By the time Will's finished, Chilton's smirk is a kettle whistling joyfully.

Will doesn't remember when the lights go out, only them coming back on again. The man in the cell next door is screaming as he is being dragged away from the girls he loved to death. Chilton stands calmly outside of Will's cell: "You are truly fascinating, aren't you, Mr. Graham?" he says, loud enough to be heard over the guttural cries. Will's meds go back to normal for a day or two, but then his neighbour changes and so do the pills and so does he. Will feels himself slipping away.

"Mr. Graham," Lindsey's hands are strong against his arms. Will is yanked out of Baltimore and lands, flailing, back into the darkness of his room at Bethesda. The paint drips from the walls and pools on the floor with the sweat rushing out of his body. Those broken cries aren't coming from another inmate at Baltimore; they're coming from him.

Sleep tugs at him sharply: an anchor with its chain draped tightly about his neck, threatening to drag him back into the earth. He clings to Lindsey so hard that he shakes. "Please don't make me go back there...please..." the room flickers in front of his eyes

between Baltimore and Bethesda. He cries even harder. "I didn't know who I was, I didn't...I didn't know."

He's falling backwards through steel and stone. Alana's voice slashes through the illusion and brings the room back into focus. "Will, you're in Bethesda, Maryland. Say it back to me: I'm in Bethesda, Maryland."

His eyes peel back like paint inside his skull. Baltimore's etched into the backs of his eyelids; murderers' hands grip him from all sides and pull him from Lindsey's grasp. "You're in Bethesda," Alana tells him, but sense leaves him in a cool rush. Will is left with the acute brace of bars under his skin. Chilton has rearranged him. He opened Will up, took everything out, and now there's rock, metal, and psychopathy where his organs used to be.

(And Lecter let Chilton think it was all his idea.)

Something cool is brought to rest against his forehead. Will still feels it as he sinks inside himself, back to the underground in Baltimore.

Hannibal is waiting for him there, always on the outside of the bars.

"William?"

His mouth is bone dry. Sweat is still sticky on his skin. The room keeps perfect time with the pounding at the base of his skull, bleeding into focus before scabbing over.

Sunlight cuts against his corneas. Will blinks lethargically. Dr. Lampman crouches in front of him, arms folded over her thighs. Her eyes stay locked on Will's. For once, he's too tired to look away. "William, do you know where you are?"

He's on the floor, crumpled next to an overturned table, several feet from the bed in Bethesda. Of course, Will can't manage to say any of that. His throat's too dry; the sound of his first name leaves him winded. Lampman doesn't move, but she understands. She lifts a cup from the floor beside her, offering it to him. The smell of ginger cuts through the lingering sedation in his arms. He manages several small sips before he has to put the cup back on the floor. The sugar revives him while the ginger settles his stomach.

(Will hasn't had ginger ale since he was a child.)

"I'm in the Bethesda Psychiatric Hospital," he croaks, steeling himself as best as he can for the fallout from the night before, "or Bethesda Home for the Psychiatrically Compromised or whatever you want to call it." The corners of Lampman's lips curl by mere millimeters, then settle back into a flat line. "Was I sleepwalking?"

"You were just regaining consciousness," Lampman replies. "The sedation hadn't worn off yet, but you were trying to walk around. Can you tell me your name?"

"You just said it," his brain starts to fixate, replaying their earlier sessions together. "Actually, that's the first time you've ever said my name."

"Would you prefer that I didn't?"

"No one ever calls me 'William'." Except his father.

"What would you like me to call you?"

He tries to lift a hand to his face, but both his arms fall into his lap and stay there. Will scrunches his eyes, head pounding now. "You can call me...you can call me whatever you want." *Just go away now. Please go away.*

"May I call you Will, then?" he shrugs weakly, wincing from the cresting pain in his head. Lampman's compassion crashes into him like a wave. "I have some Aspirin for you, Will."

He opens his eyes on instinct, terrified of what he might find in the medicine cup. Lampman, however, is true to her word. She offers him two Aspirin tablets, nothing more. He takes them dry because the cup of ginger ale is too heavy. When she extends her hand to help him up, he has to refuse that too. The wall isn't comfortable, but even the thought of standing makes him dizzy.

Lampman's tone is carefully measured, "Tell me what happened yesterday."

Will leans his head back against the wall. He strips the truth down to its barest bones and proffers them to her, all the while trying to forget what little he remembers from last night. "I had a visitor," is all he manages to say before choking on his words. Will's eyes flit across the ceiling, fighting tears. "I'm not-" his throat closes completely. He wants to tell her he's not crazy, but that only makes his attempt at running away look worse. Ironically enough, an insanity plea seems to be the only thing holding him to Bethesda in the wake of his escape attempt. He swallows the lump of fear that's bubbled up under the root of his tongue. The lie carries several fragments of his soul with it into the world. "I wasn't thinking clearly."

"About your visitor?"

"About anything." *Please don't transfer me.*

Lampman considers this. Her skepticism is palpable, but she hides it well. "Are you thinking clearly now?"

He nods mechanically, adopting the performance because his life depends on it. He hadn't seen her in three days and was concerned. That concern turned into panic. But he's fine now. He's absolutely fine. He'll answer all of her questions, play exactly by the rules, and when he finally gets the hell out of here, will finish what he started with Hannibal and a gun in Minnesota.

"Why did you run?" she asks.

Will sighs. "You know why."

“You thought my life was in danger.”

“I told you,” he releases a staccato laugh to keep from screaming, “I wasn’t thinking clearly.”

Lampman nods, seeing the futility in this line of questioning. She changes tactics but maintains her air of calm civility. “Tell me about Dr. Lecter.”

His blood turns to liquid nitrogen in his veins. “No,” Will answers automatically. He will tell her anything but that.

“Why not?”

“There’s nothing to tell.”

“Would you prefer I spoke to him instead?”

“NO,” his chest tenses; Will can barely breathe. “Stay away from Dr. Lecter: as far away as you can.”

“Why?”

“Because he-” Will’s voice cracks. He’s breaking all over again. The ragged sounds of his sobbing come back to him in a vivid flashback of the night before. He bites down hard on his lips to keep from screaming and slams his fist against the floor. Chilton molded his mind to match other inmates minds for his own advancement; Hannibal twisted him up in knots to see what he would do. Will’s anger and hurt cause him to stammer, “Just leave him out of this.”

Lampman seems closer now than she did when he first awoke, but he’s certain that she hasn’t moved. “Do you want to talk to Dr. Bloom?”

“I don’t want to talk to anyone about Dr. Lecter.”

She gives him a moment of silence before prompting, “Tell me about Baltimore.”

His bottom lip quivers, “Please don’t send me back there.”

“Why, Will?” Will sees himself reflected under the clear pools of her eyes and his heart starts racing. His next breath is a gasp. Lampman, ever calm, leans a little closer and asks him, “What happened in Baltimore?”

Happy reading!

Surfacing

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

I revised this chapter more than I have any of the others. It was certainly the most difficult to write, even more difficult to read and re-read. I do hope that it paid off: the story has been building up to this chapter, and I would very much hate to disappoint you, the eager reader, who has been so wonderful all this time. Thank you again for your continued audience! Please enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Fear death by water."

~*The Wasteland* (I 55)

Chapter Fifteen: Surfacing

Will bites the insides of his cheeks. His nightmares are ripping away from the wounds Chilton set to fester when he was admitted to Baltimore. Even his tremors have tremors. He levels his gaze at Lampman's right shoulder, "I can't."

"I'm not going to transfer you," she replies gently.

The knots in his stomach untangle so quickly that all the blood drains from his face. Will can't hide his relief no matter how hard he tries. Still, he's caught up in a rush of fear that has nothing to do with Baltimore. "I can't...let someone else...inside my head."

"I don't want inside your head," she says, "I just want to help you out of yours."

The bite returns to his voice. "Isn't that counterintuitive, Doctor - helping a patient get *out* of their mind?"

"If a *person* is already out of their mind, but I don't believe that's where you struggle. Nor do I believe there's anything to gain from staying locked up inside there."

Will tries to rebuild his walls and fails miserably. Psychologically he's already given in to her. "This doesn't just go away by talking about it."

"No," Lampman agrees with him openly, "but at some point, it does become bearable."

Will knows his trust is fuelled by exhaustion and desperation in equal measure, but he's unable to help himself. He just can't resist letting the rest of his guard down. The chance to think and speak uninhibitedly, to *not be afraid*, seems worth any horror that Lampman might unleash in return.

She prompts him once again to tell her about Baltimore. Words bubble up and out of his chest like seawater: "I was...drowning every day. Set adrift in stormy seas, trapped just below the surface...close enough for me to see the faces of everyone holding me down."

He wilts visibly from the admission, both relieved and pained in the same instant.

"Who's holding you down?" Lampman asks.

Will search the room for their phantoms. He can always feel his tormentors nearby. "Jack Crawford, Alana Bloom..." tears prickle on the edge of his vision. Will quivers trying to hold them back. He's not really angry at Jack or Alana. He resents himself far more for trusting either of them. "Dr. Chilton..."

(Hannibal Lecter.)

"He would play gospel music over the speakers. Sometimes it was the Carpenters. I'd wake up in the night to find a television in front of my cell showing televangelists..." Will can still hear them playing over and over in his mind, voices etched along the insides of his skull. "I would measure the time by the lights turning on and off; sometimes...sometimes there was no measurable time between, but I knew there had to have been. Or at least I thought I did. H-h-he..." the nightmares come back to him, breaking upon him like waves against the shore. They are vivid and palpable one minute, vague and hazy the next. "I don't remember exactly. I just know there were days when I wasn't myself, when he...he made me not myself."

Silence. The chortling of southern ministers and wailing of seventies folk music begins to diffuse into the void between him and Lampman. Will is surprised that his first instinct is to settle. Lampman isn't using the silence. She lets it stand because there is nothing to say at this moment, because there is nothing to fear at this moment. Will's soul sees fit to empty itself at her feet in response. "I have a very unique imagination," he tells her, "a seemingly limitless capacity for identifying with other people. I'm the canary Jack Crawford carries with him to dark places, because whatever madness is there affects me first.

"In Baltimore there was madness everywhere, and Chilton...he liked to watch what I would do. He would overmedicate me and play with me...just to see what shapes my mind would fold itself into."

His memories scatter. Will has trouble grasping them. They keep getting mixed up with nightmares, with the flash of basement lights crashing on and off, his screams overlapping with all the other inmates. He has to hyperventilate to keep up with all the images. "I don't know how long I was there or how many people I was when I wasn't me."

Lampman's calm is so strong it pierces through his panic. She cradles his statement carefully, observing it from all angles. "Who were you?"

There are no names in Baltimore. Will has to settle for adjectives. "I was horror and rage; I was deranged and indecent. I was awful wretched, and twisted."

"Why not imagine other places?"

Will chuckles lowly. Sadly. Angrily. The question is painful in its redundancy, but so are most of Lampman's questions. "I didn't see the point anymore," his laugh is cut short by the flashback to his meds changing that first night. "And when Chilton started playing I...I...I would open my eyes, I would close them, and I would just be in another cell."

(Lampman knows. She's known all along; she needed Will to know it though too, and he would only believe what he told himself.)

The silence of the room beckons him. Will needs to fill the empty spaces with his own testimony. "I started remembering murders that I couldn't possibly have committed. And then later mostly just my murders...er...the murders I was convicted of committing."

He releases the breath he's been holding for thirty-one days now and folds his arms around his torso to warm them. The chill of Baltimore lingers on despite his best efforts. "I dream of killing Abigail Hobbs," his breath staggers under the weight of the words. "I *know* I didn't kill her, but I dream as if I did."

Lampman is patient. She offers her next words as a kindness, "You're identifying with her killer." Will's head bobs up and down on his neck freely, the tension having suddenly dissipated. Nobody has entertained the notion, let alone sound like they believed it, that Will isn't a killer for a very long time. Lampman's tone tells him she never doubted it for a second. "Are you still identifying with her killer now?"

She's getting dangerously close to Hannibal. Will tries to sound nonplussed to send her away on another train of thought. "Sometimes."

"You told me you don't feel like a person. Is that you or the killer?"

Will chokes. The lines between him and Hannibal have faded and been redrawn so many times that Will doesn't know where one ends and the other begins. His only answer is the honest one, "B-b-both of us, I think."

"Tell me what *you* feel, Will," she urges him.

He focuses, but it's hard feeling anything aside for the cold, the reverb of sermons against stone walls, and the hate-monster thrusting itself against the inside of his rib cage.

(There are antlers piercing his intercostals muscles and red eyes where his heart used to be.)

"I don't feel anything," Will says tiredly. *Just please go away*.

Lampman wears her disbelief in every feature. She's not going to let him get away so easily, "You must feel something."

The lie is delivered with even less energy now. All his reserves are working to hold his demons in place. "I don't feel anything."

(He liked killing Hobbs, and he liked killing Cassie Boyle. He likes killing people. He will kill again.)

(*No*)

She stares him down, eyes like stone. "Tell me what *you* feel, Will."

"You already know the answer," he says darkly, hating that she's going to make him say it. Hating her enough to reply, "I don't feel anything."

(He'd like to kill Lampman too. Mount her on the stag head bursting from inside him. Hold her thrashing lungs in his hands.)

"What do you feel?"

"I don't feel anything!" he's shaking now, crumbling, first with anger and then from weakness. There's just so little of him left anymore. Hannibal and Chilton have twisted him into something he doesn't recognize. "I don't feel anything! At all! I feel nothing! I don't...I don't..."

But he does feel. He feels Dr. Lecter's regret and zeal. He feels Jack's guilt and impatience and self-loathing; Alana's pity and determination; Lampman's unerring stability and conviction. He purges it all through heaving sobs and tears: retching antlers and feathers; blood, meat, and hate across the floor. Will tries to hold himself together, but all his hands want to do is tear things apart. He drives them against his face to keep from pulling at his hair.

"I...f-f-f-feel everything," he continues crying. "I feel everything...and I can't get out of there. I can't."

The emptiness that remains is unbearable: worse than being plagued by visions of his captivity or revelations about Hannibal. Will has learned to live with his demons; he has no idea what to do now that he doesn't have them. All those tattered pieces of his himself – his blood spattered face he wore after shooting Hobbs, his fever stricken brain, his shaking gun fixed on Hannibal, his chains and Baltimore uniform – are lying on the floor in front of him. He's open, exposed, draining like a wound.

Hannibal would give him a gun and a suggestion and watch. Chilton would prod, take notes, and smile. Lampman very carefully begins picking up the pieces one by one. She unloads his gun and stays his hand in Minnesota; she folds his uniforms and chains and sets them aside; she cleans the blood from his glasses and puts them back on his face. She is silent throughout it all too, not to beckon, but because bearing witness is all she needs to do.

A small package of Kleenex materializes by his knee. Will's scowl breaks into a tragic, forced smile that sends more tears tumbling down his cheeks. He extends a shaking hand towards the tissues. "Thank you," he mutters, still shaking with new sobs. His eyes are sore when he's finished scrubbing them.

"For what?" Lampman honestly doesn't see what she's done that deserves a thank you.

"For these," he points to the tissues. "For...not saying anything."

Lampman nods. There are things to say, but Will's not ready to hear them. Besides, she's much more interested in what he might tell her. Will doesn't keep her waiting. "I feel hate," he breathes through a fresh round of sobs rising in his chest. "I am afraid all the time. Of everything. I want to go home, I want to be left alone, but I don't...I *don't* want to be locked up. I am very tired..." his head drops into his hands and stays there, "I'm tired."

Will's head pounds thickly with blood and tears, so much so that he doesn't hear Lampman move. All he hears is her state firmly that he needs to drink something. A cup moves into one of his hands, and Will drinks it mechanically without bothering to consider the contents. The taste of unadulterated water greets his parched lips, tongue, and throat. He doesn't stop until he senses Lampman's hand returning to take the cup away, until there's not a drop left and he feels like he can try walking again.

He uses the wall and Lampman's hand for leverage. His legs wobble underneath him, and his head spins mercilessly. Water and bile splash against the back of his throat. Will stops her before she can move him back to the bed, "I don't want to sleep. I can't sleep."

"You need to eat something," she says. Will finds himself nodding in acceptance even before Lampman's finished speaking because he's using what little strength he has to hold himself up. "Would you like to see Dr. Bloom?"

Will is running on basic instincts and first impulses, but the question gives him a fair bit of pause. He doesn't respond until long after he's sitting on the edge of the bed. "I think I'd just like to be alone for a while," he admits at last.

Lampman nods. She doesn't waste time telling him that there's a call button on the bed rail. She lets him know that Neil will be coming by with a tray, that she will have Dr. Bloom call later, and for Will to drink as much as he can. Then she's closing the door behind her.

Will waits for the thunder of locks but none are forthcoming. Bethesda is quiet, the room is open, and for the first time in a long time, Will actually doesn't feel anything.

Chapter End Notes

Having Will listen to the Carpenters in Baltimore is not a jab at the Carpenters, I assure you. John Carpenter's In the Mouth of Madness sees Sam Neil's character being institutionalized, and the staff there begins playing a track by the band. When thinking

about Will, I kept getting side tracked by the image of a disheveled Neil standing at the door of his cell wincing, “Ugh...not the Carpenters!” Seemed like a reaction Chilton would be proud to get from his patients.

Happy reading!

Confluence

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

I was going to wait and post this tomorrow in honour of the blu-ray, but then I remembered that the blu-ray will be here! And I can finally relieve every precious moment of the series! With commentaries! And a gag reel! And a promise of more this spring! I am doing the Dance of Joy!

(My fiancé is giving me that look.)

Ahem – so you get this week's chapter a day in advance. Thank you, readers and reviewers, for your continued support. It is a pleasure to hear from you. I'm looking forward to tackling this story with renewed zeal; I do hope you continue to enjoy it.

"Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,

Had a bad cold, nevertheless

Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,

With a wicked pack of cards. Here, said she,

Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,

(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)"

~*The Wasteland* (I 43-48)

Chapter Sixteen: Confluence

Neil brings breakfast and a no-harm, no-foul attitude within the hour. His tone is surprisingly genuine when he says, "I'm sorry you had a rough night, Mr. Graham." Will musters a glance in the nurse's direction before his gaze falls back to the floor and stays there. Last night feels like it happened to somebody else: Will simply reconstructed it from the pieces of a crime scene.

There's nothing forced or troubling about his ensuing seclusion. His door is unlocked; the windows are unbarred. Will walks the grounds and avoids people as he normally does. The only change he feels is the comfortable solidification of the world around him. For once, the ground is sturdy beneath his feet. Will feels defended instead of stifled by Bethesda's walls. He returns to his room and finds Lampman making an uncharacteristic pass through the hallway. She checks his vitals with a glance, nods, and goes on her way. Will is more unsettled by how settled he is than anything else.

The next thing he knows, he's waking up in bed to the feeling of his glasses being removed. Lindsey's pinched them between her thumb and forefinger. She folds them and sets them gently on the night table next to a medicine cup of Aspirin and a full cup of water.

Will wants to thank her but can't find the words. They're nestled under the blanket she's drawn over him. They flutter like moths after she turns out the lights. He doesn't know his eyes are closed until the dim light of morning stains his vision red.

He dreamed: the sheets are damp with nightmare sweat and Hannibal's fingers press hard against the root of his tongue. His foggy thought process swallows the nightmares up though, and Will doesn't chase after them. He lets them go.

Lampman has her coat on when he arrives for their session together. "I thought we could take a walk," she says.

Fog swirls outside the window. Rain is imminent. The world is as cloudy as Will's emotional state. "Just the day for it," he agrees.

The door squeaks open. Lampman steps confidently out onto the porch and holds the swinging door open for Will behind her. He makes that first step by holding his breath and staring hard at the aged floor. He doesn't start breathing again until the door swings shut behind him and Lampman is standing on the top step, just beyond the awning.

The bite of wet air rouses Will from his stupor. He lifts his gaze to the great wild beyond the porch rails and the defensive haze that's built up inside his head disperses immediately. His memories clarify into sharp points and blades: betrayal, isolation, violation, hate... Will wants back inside, back to walls and floors and limited vision. He wants a barrier between him and the world so that he doesn't have to be a part of it anymore. The truth is so much easier to bear when it's glaring him in the face.

Lampman says nothing. She takes the two remaining steps and stands on the lawn, waiting patiently for Will to join her. He finds her shoes to be tolerable sight, the edge of the porch is easy enough to look at, but finding the strength to stare at the seemingly boundless horizon is impossible. The world is so big, he is so small, and there's nothing out here to defend him against the horrors inside him mind.

Will doesn't conquer his fear to finally move forward. He simply realizes that telling Lampman he *can't* will hurt more than acquiescing at this point. The wet and cold kiss his cheeks, and Will's mind makes less painful associations of pre-dawn hikes with Dad to foggy shorelines, the swish and snap of line over the water, and the translucent smell of fresh-

caught trout. His recollections of Baltimore and Hannibal are overridden by thoughts that he once lived outside too. He could stand on his own two feet and defend himself.

(He hasn't remembered himself like this for a very long time.)

Slowly but surely, Will walks to the threshold of the porch and takes his first cautious step into an unfenced unknown. The mist rising from the Potomac casts odd shadows along the shoreline, but they don't shift shape into monsters this morning. His feet sink into the moist earth and he's home. He's in Wolf Trap. The dogs are barking in the distance, the house nods over waves of long grass, and Will can't breathe. He sucks breath like a fish out of water because he's forgotten the taste of air.

Lampman says something: he's not sure what but responds anyways. His feet start moving of their own volition, pausing intermittently to give his head time to stop spinning. Will's equilibrium still tilts back and forth when he's not moving though. He feels seasick. There's nothing out here to balance him: no ports of call, no walls or locks or handholds.

"Will," he's closed his eyes and the world's kept on spinning, but Lampman's voice is standing still. "Tell me what you feel."

"I'm dizzy," but the sensation is decreasing. Lampman's proximity is starting to register amidst his reeling perception. He steadies; the steel bands around his chest start to loosen.

"Do you want to go back?"

"No," his nausea climbs, "Yes. Maybe. I don't know."

He forces his eyes to open. Lampman has positioned herself in such a way that his vision's directed back towards Bethesda. The institution stands stock still against the gray sky. Will clings to that stability for balance before hazarding a glance elsewhere. He can see the fence of the courtyard from here, also sedentary; the trees past that where Hannibal chased him two nights before. Will turns towards the river to avoid reliving that experience. The Potomac has less menace now. Beyond the tangles of fog lies the crisp surface of water, beneath Will instead of above him for once.

It finally occurs to Will that there are no bars or walls here for a reason. The ground is solid beneath his feet. He's out, he's alive, and he's not going back. Lampman takes a trial stride away from Bethesda, and Will falls into step beside her, slow from fear at first, but then the sounds of the river start to relax him. He can't remember Baltimore anymore because he hasn't been there; he doesn't know Hannibal because they haven't met yet. Will stands on the banks of the Potomac at a time before law enforcement started clouding his vision. He sees his father's silhouette in his periphery and breathes a sigh of sweet relief.

Lampman lets the serenade of water wash over him for a long while before asking about fishing again. Will's answers dribble out of him in monosyllables at first, but then the dam opens and he's lecturing. He's pointing to different areas where the fish would collect, explains the tackle he would use, describes the drift of lures over the water. There's an uncertainty in her tone that he finally places mid-sentence. "You know all this," Will stares into her shoulder.

“I know enough to ask questions,” Lampman replies.

“To lure me out: you’ve been fishing for me since I got here.”

She doesn’t disagree, merely tenders, “Not to catch.”

“To what, then?”

“To release.”

“I don’t know that I can be released,” Will watches the ebb and flow of the water. Every shadow passing overhead hangs beneath the surface like a corpse. Some of them have his face.

Lampman’s eyes are on him. He has to look away: fear consumes his features. “What do you know?”

As usual, Lampman already suspects the answers, but she never does anything for her own benefit. This is all for Will.

“I know that I’m not insane,” he feels marginally less afraid for finally saying it out loud. “I know I didn’t kill Abigail Hobbs or anyone else for that matter. Not that I don’t remember doing directly. I know I was set-up. I know *who* set me up. I know...I know what I have to do about it.”

Lampman saves that line of questioning for another session. She redirects Will back to his recent breakthrough. “What do you know about Baltimore?”

“I just want to forget about Baltimore,” Will catches Lampman’s gaze for a moment. “I know as my psychiatrist, you’re going to discourage me from doing that.”

“I’m going to discourage you from ignoring Baltimore,” she concedes. “I’m also going to discourage you from demarcating your life as being either before or after.”

Will’s tone grows tighter, “I’m the same person I always have been.”

“Broken.” His word, not Lampman’s. It doesn’t fit her mouth at all.

“Chilton just found different ways to do it: having me identify with broken people certainly helped.”

“Were you identifying with the others in group?”

“No,” Will replies, though she already knows the answer, “I was identifying with someone else.”

Lampman doesn’t have to ask who. She looks back at the river.

For the first time since they started talking, the silence scares Will.

Walking back to Bethesda, Will can't help but feel he's headed in the wrong direction. He keeps peering over his shoulder to the river and shadows, accustomed now to the wide open spaces and looking forward to reclaiming them. He's not ready today, but everything's looking eventual now.

Lampman lets him pass the day in solitude again and holds their next session outside as well. Will doesn't hesitate by the door this time, but he still panics for the first few steps beyond the porch until a look back at Bethesda reminds him that there are still walls for him to hide behind.

(The sunlight feels different, warmer somehow, without any fences in Will's line of vision.)

They walk down the bank: Lampman directs Will's focus on his own thoughts and feelings. He chastises her for the exercise, but he can't deny its effects. On the walk back to Bethesda, Will doesn't feel anyone else inside his head but himself.

She has him walk her to group therapy afterwards. Will shakes in anticipation for his calm to be shattered, but the only effect the people in the room have on him is a giddy light-headedness. He leaves with the prickling sensations of solidarity, of being one of many abnormal psychologies instead of a few. He's not sure whose perspective is at work, not sure if he likes it, needs to get away as quickly as possible before he thinks about it too much.

Alana's usual visitation time comes and goes; Will doesn't mind. He circles the courtyard, challenging himself to approach the chain link fence again. The forest beyond is still, vacant. If Jack is having agents stake the place out, they're nowhere in sight. Not today anyways. Not right now.

(Jack expected him to run.)

He retracts his hand from the fence as if scalded. The universe, it seems, isn't finished giving him reasons not to trust Jack Crawford.

Will emerges from the forest just in time to receive another: Jack is standing just outside Bethesda's side door. His hands are in his pockets and his face is twisted in what's become a typical blend of guilt and frustration.

Jack isn't carrying a file folder, but Will knows exactly why he's there.

Happy reading!

Desperate Times

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

This chapter nearly destroyed me. Having the story plotted in my head was evidently one thing, but putting it on paper was quite another. Thankfully, I trimmed the fat, focused the heck up, and got this installment to a point where I don't feel ashamed to post it. Much.

As usual, dear readers, I dedicate this chapter to you. Thank you so much for coming back each week, for your lovely comments, and for your conversation. It's a pleasure knowing you're out there and hearing from you. Please, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Here is the man with three staves, and here is the Wheel,

And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card,

Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,

Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find

The Hanged Man."

~*The Wasteland* (I 51-55)

Chapter Seventeen: Desperate Times

"Jack."

"Will."

The second most uncomfortable silence of their acquaintance passes between them. Will's nerves fray anew. He knows exactly what isn't being said right now, so Jack's silence is jarring. "I think you should go," he says casually.

"I think we should take a walk," Jack says just as casually.

“I want you to go.” For so many reasons, not in the least being Jack’s unerring defence of Hannibal Lecter. Will’s new sense of completeness is starting to shatter all over again, and the longer Jack stays, the more pieces he will have to pick up later.

Jack understands perfectly, damn him. He immediately dismisses Will’s suspicions by saying, “I’m not here on a case. Alana told me you didn’t want to see her. She’s concerned about you.”

“I’m fine,” he really needs to learn how to say that without clenching his teeth. Jack’s skepticism hits him with tidal force. “I don’t want any visitors.”

“You wanted to see Dr. Lecter though.”

Will doesn’t know how to respond to that without giving himself away. “I wanted answers,” is honest enough that his jaw doesn’t cramp from lying but cryptic enough to keep Jack at bay. After a beat passes, Will feels confident enough to add, “He was surprisingly forthcoming.”

Jack sighs. “I know you’re angry, Will.”

He doesn’t mean to lose his cool, but he does. Four little words shatter what little resistance he’s built up to the hate he’s been gradually confronting over the past few days, and Will snaps, “No! No, you don’t know! You don’t know what it’s like to be locked up. You don’t know what it’s like to not have anyone believe you. You don’t know what it’s like to not know who you are. You don’t know, Jack! And you don’t want to know! You want me to come when I’m called and look where I’m told!”

There’s a surprising lack of anger in Jack’s tone when he replies, “I said I wasn’t here on a case.” Will barely notices; he’s too furious. “I wanted to be, but I’m not.”

His anger abates somewhat from Jack’s admission. He distantly recalls interrupting the older agent at a crime scene three days ago. “What stopped you?” Will demands.

“The good Dr. Lampman has informed me – in no uncertain terms - that if I so much breathe a word to you about murderers, psychopaths, or anything related to the FBI, I will be banned from the premises.”

Will’s brain short circuits. He’s used to psychiatrists either enabling Jack or being helplessly shooed away by him, not successfully intervening in his mad games. He shoots a glance over Jack’s shoulder to Bethesda’s interior half-expecting to see Lampman hovering within, but she’s nowhere in sight. Of course not: she doesn’t have to be. Lampman’s power is so absolute here that even Jack Crawford wouldn’t dare break her rules. Will is simultaneously impressed and terrified. The only other psychiatrist he’s met who wields that type of power is Dr. Lecter.

He speaks slowly, still negotiating his feelings about Lampman in light of what she’s just done: “You don’t really think I’m ready to go back into the field.”

Jack bristles visibly, but it's not the statement that bothers him. Will recognizes the look in his eyes: Jack actually was considering bringing him back into the field until he arrived at Bethesda. Still, the older agent's voice holds not the faintest trace of deception. "I wanted your insight. And I thought a case would give you something to focus on."

"Besides Dr. Lecter."

"Besides *anything*," Jack huffs, "but yes, besides Dr. Lecter. You could use a new perspective."

"I've had enough of new perspectives. I want my own perspective right now."

"That's exactly what Dr. Lampman said."

Will refuses to bite; he doesn't want to consider the implications of the bait. "The last time I did this, I got my head so wrapped up in psychopaths that I lost touch with reality," he doesn't have to mention the helpful pushes Dr. Lecter was giving him at the time; Jack is wincing infinitesimally already. "I was convicted and locked up and..." his mouth refuses to say Baltimore or Chilton anymore, "and you're still not entirely convinced that I'm stable."

"I'm not entirely convinced you won't make a move on Dr. Lecter," Jack corrects him, "and it turns out I was right about that."

Will sees red. The agent in the forest is still there then. He starts to walk away. "I want you to go."

"Will-"

"I'm no good to you anymore, Jack. Why don't you go find some other psychic bloodhound to fill in the gaps for you?"

Jack catches up to him quickly. Will instinctively stops. There are parts of him that will always respond to Jack's authority no matter how much he tries to shirk them. "Because I can't do this on my own," Jack says. He lets the other explanation go unspoken: both men know that the FBI isn't going to trust Jack Crawford with another protégé for a very long time, not when one's dead and the other's committed.

Will is stunned into absolute silence for a moment. Even his thoughts go still. Jack Crawford is so rarely vulnerable that Will's not sure how to react. He's not even sure what he feels until the revelation bubbles up from nowhere that *the Ripper's back*. That's the only reason Jack would even consider coming to him now.

"I don't want to do this," Jack interrupts him, dropping his hand from Will's shoulder and relaxing his stance, "not again, not to you. I pushed you once, I came back to push you again, and I was wrong. Nobody's life is worth this."

"It was until you spoke to Dr. Lampman," Will points out.

"Yeah, well, it's not anymore," Jack shifts from heel to heel and then adds, softly, "Not now anyways…"

Will bites down on his bottom lip and tries not to walk away again. He has to know. "What about my case?"

"I'm taking care of it," Jack says definitely.

"I wish I could believe that," Will's chest goes taut with rage again, "but you're looking in the wrong place, Jack."

"Hannibal Lecter." Impossibly, Jack sounds more dubious about that notion now than he did when Will was in Baltimore. "Pushing you into becoming a killer. Why would someone want that? What would he gain by having you become a murderer?"

"He knows the way I think, and he's curious about what I will do."

"He doesn't know you well enough then, because you didn't do it."

"Is that why you don't think this could be Dr. Lecter?"

"I don't think this is Dr. Lecter because there is no evidence to suggest that this is Dr. Lecter," Jack's eyes drift back and forth between Will and Bethesda, Will and Bethesda, searching for some common ground between the two. There isn't one: Jack can't save one without sacrificing the other. "There's no evidence of any kind. The DNA we pulled off of Abigail Hobbs's body isn't in the system. If it was a cop, it would be. If it was Dr. Lecter's, it would be."

He surveys the courtyard like he's forgotten where he is and shakes his head in defeat. Will isn't used to seeing that expression on Jack's face. "I shouldn't even be talking about this," he laments.

"Is your new case related?" Will has to ask.

Jack can't even muster the strength to sound angry; he started this after all. "It's the Ripper," he tells the ground.

Somehow, hearing the words from Jack's mouth makes them real. Will tries to defend himself, but he gradually becomes aware of Jack's pain without resentment. The older agent wears the blood of the Ripper's victims on his hands, bears the heavy burdens of Miriam Lass's last words, and for a long moment Will does too. He bites the insides of his cheeks so hard that he tastes blood before he becomes aware of himself again.

(*This is bad for me.*)

He wants to help, is obliged to, in fact, but he knows what it's like to lose himself in the monsters now. The fight dies in his mouth before he utters a single word. Will doesn't have the time or the strength for the Chesapeake Ripper. Hannibal Lecter is the only killer he has room for in his head.

Unfortunately, that's the only place Will has access to Dr. Lecter. The good doctor's out there, he's in here, and all the doors, windows, and fences of Bethesda are locked or guarded or both. Adding insult to injury is the very real possibility that he will never have

access to law enforcement again, especially if Jack Crawford is willing to follow orders this time.

Will's mouth goes dry. He tries to bury how bad it felt to lose himself every day in Baltimore, but he can't anymore. Working with Lampman has exposed him; he's an open wound, swelling slowly with Jack's fears and desperation as much as his own. He can't stay in Bethesda and get Dr. Lecter at the same time.

(Submitting to ECT hurt less than this.)

"I'll help you catch the Ripper," Will says dejectedly.

"Oh, no," Jack shakes his head. "I shouldn't have come here. You look better, Will. You do. You seem better."

"I am better. I feel better," and that felt like a victory until now.

"Good," Jack agrees, "let's keep it that way."

Will tries twisting Jack just a little. "You can't do this on your own."
Jack sighs again and Will knows he's lost. He doesn't play the game even half as well as Hannibal does. "I'm going to have to for now."

The conversation changes to other topics: the dogs, Lampman, Crawford's wife. Will doesn't try to change it back. He's not getting out of here today, but at least he's identified the way out. He just needs to convince Dr. Lampman of that.

(Lecter wouldn't have hesitated for a second: submitting Will to the slaughter is something he does best.)

Chapter End Notes

I think the reason this chapter gave me so much trouble is Jack: he's so chastened here, so open, and I worry that's me projecting Will's personality where it doesn't belong. Then again, Jack's vulnerability is justified. He's back in the thick with the Ripper, and he's staring one of his failings in the face. Seems natural, and yet...I don't know. I'm reluctant to call this chapter a victory. Might need a little more polishing later on.

Anyways, happy reading!

A Controversial Dish

Chapter Notes

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It was still Tuesday when I went to post this last night.
This chapter owes itself to a few things. First, to the film adaptation of Red Dragon for Abigail's wound pattern. Second, Silence of the Lambs, for the poor, dead census taker. Third, to Bedelia Du Maurier's delicate euphemism for Abigail's flesh. And finally, most notably, you, dear reader. Many thanks. I do hope you enjoy.

"The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king

So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale

Filled all the desert with inviolable voice

And still she cried, and still the world pursues"

~*The Wasteland* (II 99-102)

Chapter Eighteen: A Controversial Dish

The only computers at Bethesda are behind the counter at the nurse's station. Will has to wait until nightfall before they're completely unattended. The day staff spend most of their time hovering there, but Lindsey makes berth at regular, measurable intervals. She begins and ends her rounds there, rarely if ever returning prematurely.

Will is already in bed when she stops at his room. "Early night tonight," Lindsey notes by way of greeting. She's not suspicious, just concerned. The light's not usually out in his room this early in the evening. "Do you need anything, Mr. Graham?"

"No," he keeps his back to her. It's easier to lie when she can't see his face.

Lindsey doesn't question him. She keeps the concern carefully contained in her tone. "End of day nine," she quietly closes the door again. "Good night."

Will waits until her footsteps are disappearing towards the far side of the hospital before rising from the bed. She will have another two corridors on the main floor and one

long stretch of rooms on the second before starting her rounds again.

Just enough time to make it to the nurse's station and back.

The Ripper is an elusive monster, especially in the news. The more he is discussed, the harder he becomes for Will to see, because he's the devil in the details and the news is far more concerned with the bigger picture. Headlines scream at Will from the screen, but information about the most recent crime scene is inconsistent or nonexistent. A body was found in small town Maryland. Organs were missing. No one could be reached for comment.

Will very nearly abandons his project. He can't be the Ripper without seeing the meticulous construction of the body and not one site paints a clear picture of the scene. He leans back in the chair, away from the monitor, hoping to gain some perspective. Will briefly considers begging Jack for news, but then his eyes scan the one source he's trained himself to avoid. It's the only news source that would provide a detailed account of the crime scene and, indeed, advertises one right on the homepage.

He braces himself. TattleCrime.com has always left a foul taste in Will's mouth. He's never had the desire to visit the page and now Baltimore's robbed him of the courage. But there's no better place to find grisly, forbidden details about the Chesapeake Ripper than Freddie Lounds's flagship.

(His own name appears under the link for the home page. Will pretends not to notice, but the cursor still hovers over the words for a very long, tempting moment.)

The bright red home page springs to life before his eyes and Will's eyes start flitting through Freddie's words: a census taker seated in the archives of small town Maryland library. Thirty-five year old white male, wife and three children at home. His bowels neatly arranged in piles on the table in front of him between copies of old town censuses, save for the liver, which the Ripper took for a trophy.

Will smells copper and old paper. Blood is thick between his fingers. The census taker screams, "I HAVE A FAMILY!" but that just makes Will's satisfaction surge. The pain doesn't end tonight with this man's last breath then. Out there in the world, people will miss him. They will mourn him, even if it is only out of familial duty. He isn't just cutting apart a man's bowels; he's slashing a whole family of hearts from their chests.

He draws the intestines out inch by inch. The remarkable part about the digestive tract is how connected everything is. He can tug the intestine out through a small incision and disconnect them, then reach back inside to find the stomach waiting for him at the edge of the wound.

Will catches the scream in his mouth with his hand and holds it there with all the strength he can muster. Sweat's collecting on his brow and upper lip. Lounds's writing is lurid and sensational to the casual reader. For Will, her work is a feast for the senses. He's reconstructed too many crime scenes to not know exactly how horrific the Ripper's work is, and Lounds captures it with wonder, shock, and awe. He has to look away from the monitor

before he begins to remember who he is again, or at the very least realize that he is not the Ripper.

The nausea passes; the pounding in his head subsides. Lindsey's footsteps creak down the upstairs hallway to the next room. Will takes one shuddering breath and then another. When his vision clears, he looks back at the screen and moves to close it. He'll wait; Lampman has to release him eventually, and then Will can hunt Hannibal on his own terms.

Abigail's name stays his hand. The article from when her body was found appears in the side menu, top-rated by Tattle Crime readers.

Bile spatters against the back of his throat. He wants to walk away. He *should* walk away. History is repeating itself right here, right now, and all roads are leading back into darkness. Will feels the abyss already staring back at him without even clicking the link. Abigail already haunts him without having to see her body.

She is a reflection of Hannibal though, one of the scant few he has access to anymore. Will envisions her as a rare example of the good doctor's near silent desperation. He used her as a bargaining chip, after all. In Will's experience, desperation makes murderer's sloppy. Will can't envision him butchering Abigail the same way he did Cassie Boyle, not with all his complicated sorrow. Maybe Hannibal left more than just his grief at the crime scene.

Will clicks the link.

His hand flies to the screen when she appears, not to block her out but to draw her in. Lounds got the one photograph the Will needs to see: the aerial view of Abigail's pinioned body, where her face drips back from a body of gray cream. Lecter clothed her in a white night dress, and the resemblance to Elyse Nichols is uncanny. Will's finger hovers over her face for a long moment. Her eyes are closed, her cheeks are ashen, her neck is neatly hewn. Hannibal has dishonoured her by draping her here, yet another source of remorse for the remorseless doctor.

Will's eyes dart over the picture, ingesting all the little pieces of Lecter that the FBI and Freddie Lounds failed to notice. Abigail has been cared for meticulously. She's been bathed, groomed, and redressed. The open wound where her ear used to be is hidden under a layer of hair. The arrangement of the antlers is done in such a way to avoid her internal organs. Hannibal pierced only the soft tissue when he arranged her. There's also no visible mutilation, no missing organs. Hannibal took Cassie Boyle's lungs in a testament to Garrett Jacob Hobbs. With Abigail, he only dared to take two pieces of flesh from her lower back: just enough to incriminate the copycat and exonerate Will.

(*...but why the lower back?*)

Lindsey's footsteps interrupt his thoughts. She's moving quickly tonight. Will doesn't have much time left. He tries to close the browser window but can't find the strength to do so. Instead, he grabs the phone off the cradle, dials, and waits for an answer.

Making him wait for any more than two rings would be impolite. Hannibal answers by the third. "Good evening, Will."

"Good evening, Dr. Lecter."

"Am I to understand by your tone that we are being monitored?"

Will doesn't raise his voice above a whisper. Lindsey's footsteps are holding in a room above him. For now. "We will be soon."

"You received a visit today from Agent Crawford," Hannibal deduces with his usual frightening accuracy. "The Chesapeake Ripper has struck again."

"That's not why I'm calling," a door shuts upstairs. Lindsey's footsteps move down the hall and stop in front of the next room, the last room on the upstairs floor. Will controls his breathing by focusing on the picture in front of him. "I want to talk about Abigail."

"It is past your bedtime, Will."

"Then stop stalling, Dr. Lecter," Will doesn't give him the chance to make another pithy remark. Lindsey's stopped again, but it won't be long before she's on the stairs. Will's anger turns his voice into razor wire, "Why did you mutilate Abigail's body?"

"Antlers were her father's preferred method of presenting his corpses. They were the copycat's preferred method as well, for a time," Hannibal states casually.

"I'm not talking about the antlers," Lindsey's footsteps are on the move again. Will growls, "Why did you take the flesh from her lower back?"

Hannibal's smile is tangible over the line. "Why don't you share your impressions?"

"No," he is hissing into the phone now to keep Lindsey from hearing. Bethesda creaks every time her foot hits another stair, causing her to bear down upon him with shrieks of wood and drywall from every angle. The image of Abigail only causes his fear to rise. "Why her lower back, Doctor?"

It's impossible for Hannibal to know exactly how long he has to wait before Will doesn't have the chance to run without being spotted, but he doesn't respond until the second Lindsey is on the ground floor again. "It is very late, Will-"

"No."

"-and some conversations are best left for the morning. A pity that I have been forbidden to visit again, for the sake of your mental health, of course."

Will's blood boils. He tucks himself against the desk as tightly as possible. He can at least buy himself a few more seconds before Lindsey sees him. Hannibal savours his panic a little bit longer before bringing their correspondence to an end, "I look forward to your release."

The doctor indulges in one more pregnant pause. Rage burns in Will's chest like hellfire. Hannibal's smile slashes through him, "Good night, Will."

Abigail's dead eyes stare him down from the monitor. Will doesn't say another word; he hangs up the phone. His fingers fly to the computer again, closing the browser and forcibly shutting the machine down.

He's on his feet on the other side of the counter when Lindsey rounds the corner at the end of the hall.

"Mr. Graham?" Will hopes that lilt in her voice is more concern than suspicion. Lindsey makes her way slowly towards him. "Are you alright?"

Abigail's dead eyed stare leaves him breathless, cold, and raw. Will can't think of a good lie, so he states a close approximation of obvious, "I couldn't sleep."

Lindsey shrugs, not concerned in the least, "Well, it is early for you."

He nods for far too long to be normal. Thankfully, Lindsey's seen far weirder. She makes her way slowly along the counter to pass the nurse's station. Will can't stand how close she's getting. He's dismembered a census taker and murdered Abigail Hobbs. Will feels a scream coming on that would bring Bethesda to the ground. With one final nod then, he turns on a heel and heads back to his room.

His hand flies immediately to his mouth to keep from crying.

(*Abigail.*)

The shout of his own heart in his ears drowns out the sound of Lindsey restarting the computer behind him.

Happy reading!

Heartsick

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

Whew! This has been a busy week! I apologize for the delay in my updates. Normally, I finish a chapter over the weekend so I can proofread and post it for Tuesday. This past weekend, however, was Thanksgiving here in Canada, and I was preoccupied with overeating, visiting with family, and choosing a wedding venue (in that order). I do hope this chapter is not too late for you!

Thank you, readers! I hope you all had a wonderful week. Have an even better weekend!

"A current under sea

Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell

He passed the stages of his age and youth

Entering the whirlpool."

~*The Wasteland* (IV 315-318)

Chapter Nineteen: Heartsick

The room doesn't fit. It never did, not really, but Will is acutely aware of how poorly Bethesda suits him upon returning to his quarters. The drywall juts under his ribs. Carpet cuts into his socked feet. The window panes cut deeply into his muscles until they rattle against his bones. He is drawn into the vacant darkness like a moth to the flame. Only when the window latch is under his fingers does Will stop himself. He can't run away again and hope for Lampman's blessing. He needs to stay. No matter how much it hurts, he needs to stay.

Betrayal is a brutal bedfellow though. Will thrusts his fingers against his sternum so he can feel his ribs press against his raging heart. These aren't just his thoughts: they're Abigail's. She found Portland's rooms uncomfortable and disquieting. She felt imprisoned by her circumstances and the people enforcing them. She sought solace in Hannibal Lecter and had her life stolen as a result.

(The first time they killed together was the most exhilarating hunt Abigail had ever been on, because for the first time, she held the knife.)

Will sputters and then falls headlong into silent tears. He wants to believe that she was manipulated, but he knows better. Garrett Jacob Hobbs made killing a necessity; Hannibal made slaughter into a thrill. Will can't fault her for wanting to claim the darkness as her own, but he can't quite forgive her either. He treads through her identities as he would a minefield: there's Abigail the victim, Abigail the survivor, Abigail the killer, Abigail the corpse (*why the lower back?*). There's nowhere for him to step without exploding.

He consoles himself by faulting Hannibal. By filling the good doctor's chest with bullet after bullet. By tearing his organs out one by one and arranging them in neat piles on the Hobbs's countertops. His heart will make an excellent trophy.

No. Wrong. All wrong. And not just because Will isn't a killer. He's confusing the Ripper and Hannibal. Their crimes are overlapping, intertwining, until it's Abigail thrown over the table in the library basement and the census taker pinned on a stag's head. Will almost pitches himself into the window from the ecstatic violence billowing inside his mind. He staggers back into the middle of the room and hugs himself for balance. His torso is swaying atop his hips.

The abyss stares back at him through the window with blood-stained eyes, and Will's heart hits the floor with a thud. He sees Hannibal clearly again, this time through Abigail's eyes. They stand together in the Hobbs's kitchen where it all began – where it all ends – and horror pierces him to the core. Staying in Portland could not have saved Abigail anymore than staying in Bethesda can save Will.

This is Hannibal's design.

Will bolsters himself up for his session the next day, but it's Lampman who comes to meet Will, not the other way around. He's spent the night in front of the window staring, only half-sleeping. He's scrubbing the dampness from his cheeks and the hollowness from his eyes when he gives her permission to enter. "I lost track of time," he tells her.

Lampman's concern is immediately piqued. Not the way Will intended for this session to begin at all. "I could come back at another time," she proposes.

He rises from the chair, muttering only half-sarcastically, "I wouldn't miss this for the world, Doctor."

They take their usual route to the river's edge. Will is too focused to notice that he doesn't hesitate anymore at the threshold. The world is becoming familiar to him again. His body has adjusted to being unconfined, even as his mind builds walls where his freedom should be.

There's no easy way to broach the subject of his release, not without giving Jack away. Will ponders possible conversation starters, the most obvious not occurring to him until Lampman delivers the most cataclysmic of openers.

“What was your relationship to Abigail Hobbs?”

Will’s whole body opens up. His organs plunge into the Potomac. He is in agony pretending that his heart isn’t bobbing at the surface of the water. She can’t know, but the way she dodges his glances suggests strongly that she does. He gingerly pieces himself back together. “Is this your not-so-subtle way of asking me about Agent Crawford’s visit?”

“No,” Lampman replies, “This is my not-so-subtle way of telling you to erase your browser history. However, if you would prefer to discuss Agent Crawford-”

“I wanted-” Will hesitates. He could so easily betray Jack to Lampman and liberate himself from the older agent’s whims. Nevertheless, Abigail beckons, as does Dr. Lecter, and Will diverts Lampman’s attention from Jack. “I just wanted to see her. I wanted to understand what happened.”

“Do you?” Lampman asks.

He nods stiffly, teeth clenched, “Yes. For the most part.”

“What’s the least part?”

“Ha...” Will corrects himself before uttering the good doctor’s name, “He took something from her. A souvenir.”

Lampman’s eyes are on the river, but she’s looking right through Will. “Her killer took a souvenir from his first victim as well,” she notes.

“Her lungs,” Will says. The crime scene appears in his mind’s eye still as a centrepiece on Hannibal’s illustrious table. “Can we...talk about something else?”

“Tell me about your relationship with Abigail,” she urges.

Will is just relieved to not have to talk about Jack. “I assume you mean besides the fact that I killed her father.”

She nods, “I do.”

“I was her guardian for a time,” he can’t delineate his feelings on the subject. His relationship with Abigail is so tangled up in other perspectives, not to mention his illness. The best he can offer Lampman as an explanation is, “Thought I was her father for a while, actually.”

“Did you believe that you killed her?”

“It was certainly plausible.”

“Did you want to kill her?”

Will’s body prickles in anticipation. Lampman’s rarely so direct with her line of questioning that he can’t help but feel cornered. Still, his certainty about what transpired in

Hobbs's cabin spurs him on. He is relieved to have an audience that isn't looking for a confession of murder about his last encounter with Abigail.

"I was angry. I wanted to...be angry with her," Will's memory blurs out of focus suddenly. He remembers the anger punching its way through his chest and the sight of her pinned against the antlers. But then he's outside of himself, watching as Abigail gets draped over a stag's head. The temperature around him dips. Why did he agree to see Lampman today? "I don't know. My memory's hazy. She had just confirmed that she was the bait in her father's crimes." Another secret Hannibal already knew. He avoids telling Lampman by sharing one secret he never intended to, "I hallucinated pinning her on the antlers in her father's antler room. That's all I remember until waking up in Wolf Trap."

Lampman is quiet for a time. She's absorbed what he's said without judgment. Her silence is from forming a response. Will is filled with the urge to fill the soundlessness with more confessions again, but he resists this time. His focus on getting out is starting to waver as the wind picks up the scent of water, moss, and greenery. Winter is fading to spring at last, and Will gradually becomes aware of how free he feels.

He stops short on the path and takes a deep breath of the fresh air. Lampman stops just ahead of him, out of his line of sight, so that he can forget they're together at all.

"I don't want to talk about Dr. Lecter."

It's the only subject that would hold her tongue, especially given his activities last night. More than that, Will doesn't want this moment spoiled. He's in love with his own delusion of liberty and would hate for memories of Hannibal to remind him how imprisoned he still is.

Lampman follows his gaze with her own. "I know."

"Then aside for your occupational prerogative, why are you thinking of asking?"

"If I explain my interest, will you answer the question?"

"I'm not going to bargain with you, Dr. Lampman."

"I'm not bargaining with you. I would just hate to waste our session on my curiosities instead of yours."

"Dr. Lecter isn't interesting."

"He is for you."

"Why do you think that?"

"Because you called him last night."

Except she doesn't say that. Her eyes do, of course. They're fastened to the rocks on the shore all of a sudden. Will senses her shoulders dip too. Lampman is ashamed: she

doesn't want to spy on him, and she doesn't want reasons to have to, but Will hasn't given her other options.

"You can't help me by getting close to Dr. Lecter," he asserts firmly.

"Can you help yourself by staying close to him?"

"No, but there's no helping me, Dr. Lampman."

The wind rustles through the empty branches of the trees. Lampman turns her sights to the sky for a moment, drinking in the wide open places surrounding them. Will drinks in her perception before he can stop himself. The world is an imperfect place through Lampman's eyes, filled with damage and heartache, hurt and discomfort. Yet the contradictions are exquisite, the complexities are breathtaking, and everyone is worth the risk. He's not broken, just lost, and she's the lighthouse on the shore guiding him safely home again.

Will is comforted by that thought. Lampman believes in it more than enough for both of them. The tragedy of it all is that she's wrong about him: whatever was left of Will Graham is still in the basement at Baltimore. Whoever he is now isn't worth all the effort Lampman is putting into their sessions.

All the more reason to protect her. Lampman's curiosity will only get her killed. "Dr. Lecter is very dangerous," Will admits. "He's calculating, deceitful. He's a master of manipulation. He's also...he's also a...

He waves his hand to finish the sentence. This is a conversation he's tried to have before, but no one wants to hear his opinion.

Lampman's voice is painfully gentle. "Murderer," she guesses.

Will closes his eyes and releases a breath, waiting for the blow. "You said it," he clenches his teeth, "not me."

"Of Abigail Hobbs."

His nod could just as easily be mistaken for one of his tics.

"Of many others."

"Cassie Boyle, Marissa Schurr, Dr. Sutcliffe, Georgia Madchen..." their names are a prayer, but Abigail Hobbs's has become a promise to Will. He flashes a sad smile at Lampman. "Still think I don't need therapy?"

He's terrified when she doesn't answer him immediately. His allegations were supposed to deter her from pursuing Lecter, but the air between them is charged. Lampman's posture has taken on that dangerous edge he witnessed during their first meeting. "Stay away from Dr. Lecter, Dr. Lampman," Will tells her firmly. "Stay as far away from him as you can."

Lampman's silent nod makes a promise he knows she won't keep. His whole body shakes. "Please, don't," Will begs.

"I won't do anything without your consent, Will," she says at last.

Will wishes that Lecter felt the same way.

(The good doctor doesn't.)

Group therapy blinds Will to the darkness in his life. He buzzes with nervous energy and struggles to rediscover the cadence of his own speech when it's finished. Lampman still doesn't require him to share, but she does have him focus on maintaining his own thoughts during the proceedings. Still, no matter how hard he tries, Will ends up feeling more alive afterwards than he ever has before. The residents at Bethesda are so terrified of dying, so desperate to live, that their brains concoct the strangest means of ensuring survival. Will doesn't want to strengthen his self-preservation instincts; Hannibal is far too dangerous to face with any semblance of a spirit left. But that seems to be Lampman's point: if she can strengthen his will to live, maybe she can keep him from pursuing wicked, deadly things.

He appreciates the effort she invests in his care – he's even started to trust it now - but Will wishes she was less effective. He wants to be angry and hateful again. Instead, he's left pacing in his room, struggling to conjure an image of Abigail while getting sidetracked by memories of tiny victories over obsessive compulsive disorder that aren't his own.

The courtyard is soothing at a time when Will doesn't want to be soothed. He needs a push in Hannibal's direction again, some dark consciousness to latch onto, not hope and light and optimism.

(His room is a perfect fit when he returns. Will is unsettled in all the wrong ways.)

He falls into an easy sleep in the chair by the window after supper and dreams of still waters. An old engine rumbles in his chest. Dad takes his hand and places it on the steering rod. Wind and sun caress his head. There's not a ghost in site and Baltimore can't reach him here. Will is overcome with bliss.

The thud of his door being thrown open rouses Will from sleep. He is on his feet in a second, blinking rapidly against the cacophony of light and sound. For a moment, Will is convinced he's back in Baltimore. His room morphs into the basement cell that continues to hold him.

Lindsey slams into focus then, as does the FBI Agent she is currently tailing. Will raises his hands behind his head instinctively at the sight of the service weapon, even if it isn't pointed at him.

(Yet.)

He recognizes her sea foam Converse shoes and tailored jacket, but the bruise on her cheek is new and only just starting to heal. "Sorry," she says by way of greeting. Her

weapon disappears into its holster and is swapped for her cell phone.

"Get out," Lindsey declares.

The Agent doesn't answer. She's too busy dialing. Whoever she's calling picks up quickly. "He's fine," she tells them. "Nurse says there hasn't been any disturbances."

She shoots Will an expression of pure incredulity upon noticing that his hands are still raised. She starts gesturing then, and Will gets the impression that she has no intention of shooting him. He slowly allows his arms to lower to his sides.

"Yes," the agent approaches him in three quick steps. Will winces in anticipation of a blow. All he receives is her cell phone. "Jack Crawford for you," she tells him. Will raises it to his ear, still shaking.

"Jack," he says. Fear has his heart in a fist. He isn't going to like what the older agent has to say.

"Will," Jack is grimacing. Will can actually hear him grimacing over the phone. His heart tries to break the land speed record. "Will, I need you out of Bethesda right away."

His mind has no trouble coming up with violent images now. Will's thoughts whirl from victim to victim, starting with Abigail and never ending. "What's happened?" he asks. The hum of dead air causes his dread to pitch. "Who is it?"

Jack sighs. He doesn't want to say, and that tells Will everything he needs to know. The edges of his vision fizzle to gray and the blood drains out of his legs.

"It's Dr. Lampman," Jack says at last. "She's been attacked."

Ummmmmm...happy reading?

With Surgical Precision

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

Well, it looks like I'm back on schedule!

I don't know why this week has destroyed me as much as it has. I think it's been the weather: lots of rain, lots of wind, and loads of work. I am beat. However, I am very happy to post this chapter. I did not want another day to go by without some kind of resolution.

Readers, dear readers, I am deeply indebted to you. Please enjoy!

"Burning burning burning burning

O Lord Thou pluckest me out

O Lord thou pluckest

burning"

~*The Wasteland* (III 308-311)

Chapter Twenty: With Surgical Precision

The road is a sleek blur of glossy jet and embers. Will eyes are open mouths. They swallow the world in great gulps, tasting nothing. His is the wide, desperate stare of a cornered animal.

Lampman's being cut open for the second time in one night. She's buried beneath sterile sheets, lying prostrate on her stomach. The damage to her left kidney is unknown and unmeasured, but in Will's mind, the organ is already gone. Her first cutter slashed it out of her with surgical precision. Now the doctors will finish the job. They'll leave her in stacks around the operating room and call in Freddie Lounds for a photo op.

Will gasps, returning to himself. He's in a vehicle speeding towards Quantico, Virginia. Lampman is alive – just barely – and she was attacked by Hannibal Lecter. Of that Will is absolutely certain.

He grips the bridge of his nose, rapidly losing focus again. The Ripper keeps hijacking his impressions. "Could you turn the heat down?" he asks the driver.

"Sorry," she apologizes, flipping dials until cool air shoots through the vents. Will basks in the artificial breeze and begins to diffuse. "You were shivering. Still are."

He's just looking for a neck to wring, but Will doesn't let that slip to the woman who's greeted him with a gun twice. He doubts she'll be sympathetic when he follows up his admission of homicidal urges with more accusations at Hannibal Lecter.

They arrive at the BAU within an hour, and Will retraces his footsteps to Jack's office without leaving his thoughts once. The assault on Lampman is a clear invitation for him from Lecter (it *has* to be), but Will can't think of a way to explain that to Jack without ending up in a transport back to Baltimore. He's nowhere near resolute enough to deceive, not when Lampman's dying.

(The Ripper turns her operating room into a one-room play that ends in torrents of blood, and then Will sees himself turning Lecter into a pin cushion with whatever objects he can find.)

He ducks into the men's room at the first available opportunity. Red walls and white porcelain churn in front of his eyes before draining immediately from sight. The scream from long ago is building again in his mouth. Will plunges his face and hands into icy water to save himself from a full blown episode.

His brain switches gears out of self-preservation, only they head in the wrong direction. Suddenly, Lampman's fear is all to palpable for him. She's blindsided by the pain in her back, is left insensate by shock, and then streams into Lecter's hands like a puppet cut from her strings.

Will bucks out of the water. Slams his hands against the sink. Counts to ten, to fifteen, to twenty. There are not enough seconds for him to calm down. If Will's not Lecter, he's Lampman. If he's not Lampman, Will's himself, and he wants Hannibal to suffer so badly that he becomes the Ripper without even realizing it.

A towel materializes on the edges of his vision. Agent Quick-Draw's stance is a bizarre mix of trust and trepidation: she's standing at arm's length while her eyes scan the ceiling for possible intruders.

"This is as uncomfortable for me as it is for you," she say. Will's glare leaps between her face and the towel, and she starts to glare right back even though she's still not looking at him.

Will rips the towel from her fingers and begins scrubbing his face. Her presence, unwelcome as it is, distracts him from his current identity crisis. "There's a strict no talking

policy in the men's room," he informs her.

She tosses her shoulders and stalks back towards the door.

Will waits with bated breath for her to leave, but she doesn't. She takes up a post in the entranceway: on guard for him, against him, both? Will doesn't want to know; he doesn't care. He is tired of being the wronged man. "I didn't kill them," he declares without a hint of desperation in his voice. All his desperation died with Jack's phone call.

The Agent's silence is so pronounced her corner of the room collapses on itself. Will feels the gravitational pull in the room shift to where she's standing. Her disbelief is trumped first by fear and then by forced apathy. "There's a strict no-talking policy in the men's room," she reminds him.

Will's knuckles throb from a phantom punch he only half-remembers. He tries to recreate Lampman to fill the void in the room, but she's just a shade right now. Lecter knew exactly where to cut to make Will feel the most pain.

Jack is morose when he finally arrives at his office. He hazards a single look at Will before his head falls again. Guilt is a heavy burden to bear, and Jack has yet to realize just how much for which he's truly responsible.

At first, Will thinks that's the reason Jack's guilt is so interesting for him, but the atmosphere in the room is spinning from more than just the magnitude of Lampman's assault. He's all the more curious when Jack greets him by saying, "The hospital just called: Dr. Lampman is in recovery. They were able to save the kidney, but it'll be a while before she's back at work."

The ensuing relief deflates Will. Thoughts of Lampman dying horribly come to a crashing halt in his overworked brain. They're quickly replaced with new ideas and none of them are calming. Hannibal didn't kill Dr. Lampman and Jack's feeling guilty. Either those two thoughts are unrelated, or there's another conversation they need to be having. "Are you upset about that?"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Jack's warning is still the best defence the older agent has. Will swallows thickly and abandons his line of questioning. "It was going to be a while before I was released," he says darkly.

"You think this is the copycat?"

"You think this is the copycat too. If you didn't, I would still be at Bethesda."

Jack doesn't even try to deny it. He shrugs off his jacket and hat, "I think this is connected to you. Abigail Hobbs's body turns up just before you're about to receive

electroconvulsive therapy, and now your psychiatrist is assaulted outside her home."

Will's blood boils, "Too little, too late, Jack."

"And there's no such thing as better late than never," Jack accedes. He tosses his coat and hat on the chair.

The quiet grinds against Will's eardrums. He could tolerate Jack's silences before, but they're wasting precious time. "So what happens now? Transfer and referral?"

"I'm putting you in protective custody."

"No, you're not."

"Are you not listening to me?" Jack's starting to sound like himself again. His melancholy is yielding to anger. "I'm telling you that I believe you: someone is playing games with you."

"And you really think that goes away because you put me in protective custody? He's gotten through you to me before, Jack. He got to me in Baltimore. He is *still* getting to me."

"I'll find him."

"You're refusing to look!" Will shouts. He stares at Jack's bar: all the bottles are half-empty.

Jack sighs; his remorse is nauseating. "I looked into Dr. Lecter, Will. Just after your conviction, I did a full background check."

Will doesn't mean to give himself away so easily, but Hannibal always did have a way of weakening his defences. "Monsters like Dr. Lecter don't show up on background checks, Jack. He is an intelligent psychopath. He's survived this long without capture because he knows exactly how to hide."

"Dr. Lecter did not attack Dr. Lampman."

"She was keeping him from visiting. She was starting to ask questions. I told her to stay as far away from him as she could and..."

"This is not your fault, Will."

"I know! It's his!"

Jack's voice grows even more forceful, "Dr. Lecter did not attack Dr. Lampman."

"How do you know?"

"Because I was having dinner with him. Tonight."

Will should have known: Dr. Lecter has stitched himself into the fine darts of Jack's suits. He's embedded himself into the slope of Jack's shoulders and the faint scent of brandy that Will is finally able to place. His face breaks out in the bitterest of grins, and he laughs. He laughs through the pain in his kidney, his throat, his head, and his heart. "Of course," Will presses his hand against his face to finally stop, "Of course, he invited you to dinner tonight."

He can't stop shaking. The tremors are radiating from the marrow in his bones. "Take a seat, Will," Jack beckons, his voice and uncharacteristic mix of concern and pity. Will ignores him completely, lost in his own wretched shuddering. The same air that forced Jack's head to bow upon entering the room is now crushing his chest. He can't argue against an alibi without playing even further into Lecter's hand.

(Which is precisely what the good doctor wants.)

Jack's sigh could level cities, "I thought this would go away when you got better."

"The better I get, the worse it gets," Will replies. "It was easier when I didn't know what he was."

"Hannibal Lecter: intelligent psychopath."

Will lets Jack's words hang in the empty air between them like some of Abel Gideon's makeshift Christmas ornaments. Hannibal is so powerful out here. Even in Jack's office, his influence devastates Will. He's destroyed every option except the one most advantageous to him, and Will has no choice but to accept.

"I know-"

Jack's cell phone cuts him off. Will sinks back inside himself as the older agent answers in his usual monosyllables. He finds the strength to lift his eyes from the floor at last and casts a long, meaningful stare at Will.

He hangs up without saying goodbye. "That was the Montgomery County Sherriff's office. A young man was picked up off the highway just north of Rockville a few miles from Lampman's house. He has blood on his hands. They're still looking for the knife."

"They'll find it quickly," Will wants to tear the whole building apart. "He got what he came for."

Jack doesn't say anything. He very slowly replaces the phone in his pocket, embarrassed and guiltier now for having overreacted in the first place. "Relax, Jack," Will says, "your copycat is still out there."

"Serving me dinner, is that right?"

He doesn't bother answering. Jack's looking for a fight right now, and Will's not in the mood.

“You expect me to believe that Hannibal Lecter manipulated a man into stabbing Dr. Lampman?” unbelievably, Jack actually sounds like he’s trying to wrap his head around that theory. “Why would he do that?”

“This copycat,” Will makes a face. He is loathe to speak of Dr. Lecter as an unknown entity, but Jack is far more likely to stand on his side if he avoids making allegations right now. “He is curious about the way that I think. He can’t observe me inside Bethesda; he wants me out in the open again. He wants me accessible. Lampman prevented that, just like Chilton was going to prevent that with ECT.”

“But then why have you locked up in the first place?”

“Because...” now Will has to think, and the answer emerges too quickly to his eager mind, “because he’s killed before. He’s going to kill again. And I was an easy target.”

“Wants to push you, wants to prod you, wants to break you.”

“Baltimore did all that for him,” Will’s eyes smoulder as a sad smile stretches across his face, “Now he wants the chance to finish the job.”

And in order to catch Lecter, Will has to give him the chance to do it.

Happy reading!

Desperate Measures

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

Happy belated Hallowe'en, everyone!

I am so excited to get this chapter up. I've been waiting for some of the developments in the next installments since I started writing back in...oh, my goodness, July! Thank you kindly for sticking with the fic for all this time. Your readership really makes my week brighter. I hope you enjoy!

Chapter Twenty-One: Desperate Measures

Their phone call was brief and cryptic, but once Will's mind has adjusted to being back in the BAU, he fixates on every word that passed between him and Hannibal Lecter the night before. Lampman's injury and his ensuing flight from Bethesda can be traced to their exchange, specifically their vague discussion about Abigail. Will's questions about her lower back had sparked the doctor into action. He just hasn't the faintest idea as to why.

Lecter's mindset when it comes to Abigail is a slippery creation. She wasn't just a piece of meat to him. Her position was one of ever-shifting altitudes in relation to his lofty post; at times, Lecter held her in higher regard than he did himself. Will's head swirls with religious connotations: Lecter as God, Abigail as mankind. He was molding her into his own likeness.

(Just like he was molding Will, only with different tools.)

Will thinks the heart would have made a more fitting trophy. Lecter did love Abigail, after all, in his own twisted way. Then again, he didn't kill her as himself. Lecter was the copycat at that moment, and the copycat enjoyed confounding law enforcement, not make poetic statements about human relationships. He took from her lower back because it was the least offensive way of desecrating her corpse while still freeing Will from prison. Just like assaulting Lampman was the most effective way to get him out of Bethesda.

...but why the lower back? The thought nags at Will from one end of Jack's office to the other. He pace erratic tracks in the carpet from corner to corner, wall to wall, until the room becomes the entire world. Confounded as he is by Lecter's thoughts, Will knows that there is more than one meaning behind Abigail's injuries. Hannibal wouldn't want him focusing on small details. He wants to test the limits of Will's expansive cognition. Abigail is freedom and confinement, the poison and the cure. She released Will from one prison into another of Lecter's making. His keeping Will on the phone was as much about terror as it was about suggestion. Abigail's wounds have meaning beyond Will's release, and Lecter wants him to find out what that meaning is.

Lampman had to be done away with then. Not permanently: Hannibal respects her professionally and appreciates the pains she's taken to aid Will's recovery. He orchestrates her assault with the utmost care and the slightest pushes. Her assailant will be a former patient, someone suggestible, cracked enough to break from the slightest brushes from Lecter. He won't know why or how he came to drive a knife into a woman's kidney, only that it was his idea.

Will stops: stops pacing, stops thinking, stops breathing. Jack's office cuts sharply into focus, but the rest of the BAU has disappeared. His heart pounds loudly to fill the silence, and when it finally breaks the sound barrier, Will listens to it dancing away from him. Down the long stone corridor, weaving along the bars, before crashing to a halt outside of a locked, steel door beyond.

He forces his eyes to remain open, knowing all too well what's waiting for him if he closes them.

His vision starts to blur. The skin of Jack's office starts to rot away, revealing bones of brick and muscles of iron. Hannibal's presence is hot behind him. Will sees his freedom as the solution to a mathematical equation. He is only here because Hannibal wants him here. He can be locked away again – is *being* locked away again – to suit the doctor's whims. Jack's office is still a prison, but it's a prison where Hannibal can get to him. Abigail's wounds compel him to journey back into darkness, into Hannibal.

Will just hopes he can see the trap before it springs this time.

Gray dawn streams through the windows, filling Jack's office with gloom. It's the perfect complement to Will's headspace. He's foggy. His thoughts grind against one another. Sleep clings to him like a wet blanket.

He finds a jacket bunched into a pillow by his head: hardly Jack's handiwork. Sure enough, Alana's taken a seat in the chair opposite him. She has one of Flannery O'Connor's books open on her lap but isn't reading it anymore. Her eyes have found their way to the glass panels on either side of Jack's door, out to the still vacant hallways of the BAU.

Will wishes she would go. The night still registers to him like a dream, and he so wants to keep it that way. Lecter is a figment of his imagination, Baltimore is a nightmare,

Lampman is fine, and he can go back to Louisiana with a clean slate.

"How's Dr. Lampman?" he swallows to keep his voice from cracking again.

Alana turns to face him, the ghost of a sad smile haunting her features. "As well as can be expected," she closes her book. "The doctors are confident she'll make a full recovery."

"I'm sure," Lecter wouldn't have it any other way. "Have they identified her assailant?"

"No, not yet."

But only because they're looking in the wrong place. Will bites down on his bottom lip, fuming in silence.

Alana notices immediately. "This isn't your fault."

"I know," he agrees. Her gaze makes him uncomfortable in his own skin, but the chair has left him too stiff to move. Will locks himself away in his own head again to hide. "Where's Jack?"

"He's on his way back from the Montgomery Sheriff's Department. Lampman's assailant still isn't talking."

"There's nothing to say. He doesn't know why he stabbed Dr. Lampman. He doesn't know who put him up to it either."

Alana sighs. Obviously, she was hoping Will wouldn't have deduced that. "They'll find him, Will: this copycat can't hide forever."

"He's very good at hiding," Will notes, staring at the ceiling. He can't handle another failed conversation about Lecter with her this morning. "So what happens now?"

"Jack's trying to set up a plea bargain."

"No," he doesn't care about Lampman's assailant. "What happens to me?"

"You're in Jack's custody for the time being," Alana states primly. She doesn't like the way those words sound at all. Still, her voice warms as she continues speaking. "You won't be going back to the hospital though."

"Where am I going?"

Alana is uncharacteristically enigmatic, "Somewhere safe."

"What about my continued psychiatric care?" Will scoffs.

"I would be coming with you," she replies, "so long as you're amenable."

Will shakes his head, "This copycat is still after me."

“Only Jack would know where you were.”

The stiffness drains out of him. He rises from the chair, propelled by a nervous energy that makes his whole body hum. Hannibal would know. Jack would let a detail slip over dinner one night or invite the good doctor in on the investigation. Then it wouldn’t just be his life pitted under Lecter’s pendulum: Alana would be in grave danger too.

“I want to talk to Jack.”

“Will-”

“Listen: I know that your collective delusion here at the FBI is an effort to be comforting, but the fact remains that this copycat is far too intelligent to be fooled by a private getaway,” Will’s heart races. He has a brief vision of the walls in Baltimore’s basement rattling from the sheer force of his temper. “He knew about my illness, he knew about the crime scenes, he knows Jack, knows you, knows me, and he knows exactly how to respond to anything we could do. I am a rat in a maze. He isn’t just going to let me go.”

Alana doesn’t want to accept that. Her face is closed and hardened in a way that Will’s never seen before. Even his tirades against Hannibal haven’t unnerved her as much as this outburst. The realization that he is trapped in a battle with an unknown foe and that there is nothing to be done about it seeps slowly through her defenses. She is finally coming to understand that her choices are as limited as Will’s.

“What to do, then?” she says, only half-wondering. Tears prickle on her lower lashline because she knows *exactly* what to do.

“I need to talk to Jack,” Will replies, imagining the bricks in Baltimore’s basement crumbling as he does. “This has to end.”

Alana goes from sorrowful to furious in a matter of milliseconds. Will expects nothing less: her mood has been treading a fine line between the two for months. “You cannot approve this, Jack!”

The silence from the other lines says that Jack will approve though. Interested as he is in preserving Will, Jack’s interests have always been to the killers and cases first. He wants the copycat more than he wants the Ripper in some respects. The copycat has undermined Jack in ways the Ripper could only dream of, first by helping the investigation and then by hindering it. Jack wants to repay the copycat in kind, and he is, as usual, willing to put Will in harm’s way to do it.

“We don’t have a choice, Alana,” he says sternly.

“Yes, we do have a choice! We always have a choice!”

“Our only other choice won’t draw the copycat into the open. The longer Will remains hidden, the longer the copycat will stay hidden.”

“The solution is not to leave Will out in the open as bait!”

“He will not be out in the open alone.”

“That’s what you said the last time,” she glares at the phone. “You have made a career of using agents as human shields, Jack.”

“This is not for my protection!” it’s the first time Jack’s ever raised his voice to Alana, and Will can’t blame him. Alana’s hacking away at his vulnerabilities with a viciousness Will didn’t think she possessed.

“Well, it’s certainly not for Will’s!”

“It is his choice!”

“He is under duress, Jack. He doesn’t know what he wants.”

Will takes advantage of the brief silence passing between the two titans to remind them, “I`m right here.”

Alana takes a deep, shuddering breath. Guilt chews away at Will’s abdominals. He’s taking advantage of her as much as he’s taking advantage of Jack, and the only reason he feels miserable is because he doesn’t feel miserable at all. In their own small ways, both Alana and Jack deserve to be exploited. She won’t stand in the way of what he wants and Jack will always push him in a mutually advantageous direction. It’s the perfect combination for self-destruction.

Jack phrases the next question perfectly: “Are you ready to do this, Will?” Not “Are you sure you want to do this?” or “I think you should have your head examined”. No matter how Will answers, he’s still agreeing to Jack’s agenda.

He meets Alana’s stare for a long moment, wishing that she could see inside him the way he sees inside her. She would know, then, that he isn’t doing this is a ploy for attention, that Hannibal is a killer, that this doesn’t end with him running away and hiding. She would stand by his side as he goes to war with the most dangerous man the world has ever seen.

For now though, the best Will can manage is to look away. It’s the only apology he can muster. Alana’s face crumbles. “I don’t have a choice,” he tells Jack.

Happy reading!

Red Sky in the Morning

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

Apologies for the delay! I had reporting due this weekend, and unfortunately, no matter how desperate I was to work on this fic, reports took precedence over fanficcing. On the bright side, there's no more reporting until...oh, I don't know, later. But either way, not now! YAY!

The chapter title comes from ye olde saying – "Red sky in the morning, sailor's warning." Make of that what you will!

Thank you, readers! I hope all is well with you. Please, enjoy!

"In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust

Bringing rain

Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves

Waited for rain, while the black clouds

Gathered far distant"

~*The Wasteland* (V 393-397)

Chapter Twenty-Two: Red Sky in the Morning

Initially, Jack suggests a hotel; Will turns him down. There are too many witnesses at a hotel: Hannibal would never risk exposure of that magnitude, and Will would always be under a watchful eye. Much as Jack wants him supervised, he's forced to relent and allows Will to choose his accommodations. "I want to go home," he says.

Jack isn't happy – he sighs as much – but even he can't deny Will's request. The house is a strategic play, an invitation. If they want to lure the copycat out, then Will needs to be available. His house is very much in the open, and the copycat has been there before.

"You'll have an armed guard on the premises twenty-four/seven," is Jack's only response.

"The copycat isn't going to come if I'm being watched," Will remarks.

"They'll be discrete," Jack folds his arms defensively. "I'm not leaving you out there alone."

Again is implied. Will lets it go. He considers asking Alana to bring the dogs back, but he stops himself. Alana is fuming. She's a raging storm in a vibrantly patterned suit standing watch from the corner of Jack's office. He can't bring himself to ask anything from her at the moment. Besides, the dogs are a liability. They know Hannibal. They *like* Hannibal. He could march onto the property and slaughter all seven of them before any could raise the alarm. An armed guard could probably manage to get off a round or two before Hannibal finished them off.

"He cannot just stay out there on his own all the time," Alana snaps.

Jack looks at Will meaningfully. She does have a point.

"I won't be out there all the time," Will replies. He wishes he had a chance to apologize to Alana for what he's about to say, because she's really not going to like what comes next. There's no time for apologizes though: they're moving full steam ahead with this plan. "The copycat wants me *available.* I have to investigate cases again."

Jack's eyes widen just enough to show he's surprised, but it's Alana's shock that Will feels. Her outrage makes his bones rattle under his skin. "You cannot be serious!" she roars. "Sending you home is one thing, investigating cases is quite another."

"He wants me out there."

"That doesn't mean you have to appease him!"

The room descends into blazing silence. Will's ears are left ringing. He's never heard Alana this furious before. Even Jack doesn't dare interrupt.

Her whole body shakes as she continues speaking. Every outraged syllable is another blow of blunt force trauma against Will's body. She's never yelled at him like this before. Alana Bloom has never yelled at *anyone* like this before. "He had you convicted of five counts of murder and committed to a maximum security mental facility!" her body goes taut all of a sudden. "You were moments away from electroconvulsive therapy! He mislead us – me, Jack, *everyone* – into thinking you were an intelligent psychopath! Why are you giving him the opportunity to do that again?"

"Is that going to happen again?" Will mimics her anger to hide his fear. She's right, of

course: Hannibal arranged for him to be incarcerated in the first place. The good doctor could always do so again. Nevertheless, Will can't let Alana hurt his chances for vengeance. He needs to finish the fight, and he can't do that from anywhere else except where Hannibal is. "You make it sound like you're just going to stop trusting me again."

Alana's wounded expression lasts for only an instant, but Will's never going to forget it for as long as he lives. She reins her fury in afterwards, and the energy in the room subsides to an eerie calm. Her face sets itself into a neutral mask, "What makes you think he will let us trust you? You said it yourself: he wants you exposed, he wants you vulnerable. He did it before so successfully that you were locked up. He can do it again."

"Not while I'm around," Jack insists. The hope is almost gone from his eyes though. He provides none of the feigned solidarity Will was hoping for to win this fight.

Alana senses his uncertainty, takes advantage, and scoffs him. "I can't do this again," she tells the ceiling. There's the unmistakeable edge of a sob in her voice. "Not when I know what's coming. I can't just stand by and watch you get hurt."

Will bites down on his lower lip to keep from giving himself away. He can't make any accusations against Hannibal, not when he's finally earned Jack's endorsement. Still, he can't help but get in a pre-emptive, "I told you so." Even in his best case scenarios, Will doesn't see himself getting the chance to ever set Alana straight about her former mentor. She is going to end up seeing Hannibal for herself.

The best he can do is keep Alana as far away from the conflict as possible.

"Then don't," he says. She scoffs him too, so Will takes aim at a more sensitive subject. "Not this time, at least. You've always been so good at standing idly by even as the blade's about to drop."

Jack's voice has the faintest traces of a warning, "Will."

Fear keeps his mouth moving despite the interjection. He can imagine Hannibal tearing Alana apart a thousand different ways. "You knew better than I did how bad this work was for me but found a psychiatrist who would push Jack's agenda. You *knew* I was feeling unstable, that I was hallucinating, but said nothing – to anyone! You left me in Baltimore even though you knew exactly what Dr. Chilton does to his patients!"

"Will!"

He hates Jack. It should have been Jack convicted for murder. It should have been Jack in Baltimore. It should have been Jack instead of him. Instead of Miriam Lass. Instead of Alana. How unfortunate that Jack holds no interest to Hannibal as a victim. There's no need to protect Jack: the doctor knows better than to kill the one person who will put Will in harm's way.

(Why does saving her hurt so much?)

“You have been in a position to stop this from the beginning,” Will winces from how childish he sounds.

In his wildest imaginings, Will can’t fathom Hannibal inflicting the kind of pain he’s just exacted on Alana. She doesn’t even bother holding back her tears: there’s no point. He’s eviscerated her emotionally. He’s ripped all the best parts of her to pieces and painted the room with her remains. And he won’t ever get the chance to make it up to her, not with the way his life is going.

Alana responds with a frightening amount of control. “I’m not engaging with this, Will.”

He keeps up the act by interrupting her, “Of course, you’re not.”

“But I am not going to take responsibility for this either,” she shoots a look at Jack. “You’re right for saying that I didn’t volunteer as your psychiatrist, but I told Jack about the first signs of your instability. I also fought for you to be placed anywhere other than Baltimore Psychiatric Hospital!”

She glares openly at Jack then, and Will understands immediately. He plants his feet so firmly on the floor that his ankles throb. The alternative is to take off running. He’s sold himself out again – rather characteristically – to the one person he shouldn’t trust. A person he knows that he can’t trust. Worse, he’s alienating his only remaining safe haven. Without Lampman, Will is alone: painfully, horribly alone.

Alana senses that, but she doesn’t stop. He has pushed her past the point of stopping. “I might not intervene effectively on your behalf in a professional capacity, but I trusted you were intelligent enough to protect yourself. I trusted you to not be so self-destructive!”

He drives his hand against the lower half of his face to hide.

Alana brushes more tears off her cheeks, “I am sorry for what’s happened to you, Will, and I will continue to be sorry, but I can’t help you if you don’t want to help yourself.”

She storms of the office.

Will’s chest aches; he hasn’t taken a breath since Alana started speaking. He tries to inhale only to discover there’s no room left in his lungs for air. Hate has swelled up inside him, crushing his organs against his bones. He can’t even hear his heart beating over the sound of Alana’s voice in his head.

Jack signed him over to Baltimore. To Chilton. To all those other minds.

He’s vaguely aware of a growing suspicion that Hannibal was probably responsible, but Will ignores such thoughts. He wants to be angry with Jack. He wants to hate Jack. Hating Jack is the only thing that feels right at the moment.

Will knows he only has himself to blame, but this certainly feels like part of Hannibal’s plan too.

The arrangements are made quickly after that. Will's paired with Agent Pollard, a clean-cut former farm boy from the Southwest. He has a military bearing and speaks exclusively in polite monosyllables: "Yes, sir. No, sir. Will do, sir." Will is immediately on edge, but he takes some comfort in the thought that Hannibal might not kill Pollard. Pollard is inoffensively banal, quite possibly the least interesting agent in the FBI. Hannibal wouldn't bother with someone so boring.

Pollard leads the way to the parking lot. Jack stays at Will's side for the walk. "We're going to have a long talk about Baltimore when this is over, Jack," Will says discretely.

"It'll be a short talk," the older agent replies, "The court already made its decision."

"You endorsed it."

"I didn't fight it."

"You knew the kind of work Chilton was doing."

"And I knew he wouldn't affect you."

"Because you thought I was a psychopath?"

"Because I know you," Jack eyes beam. His confidence belies the earlier hopelessness Will detected earlier, but it comes as no comfort. Chilton took Will's resilience as a challenge and invented ways to destroy him. Jack's confidence means nothing in the face of what happened, and Will resents him enough at the moment to take everything back. He'll go away with Alana. He will disappear. Damn Jack Crawford. Damn him to hell.

Will doesn't breathe a word of his mental tirade though. He takes a deep breath and redirects his focus. After all, no matter how much Will loathes Jack, he still hates Hannibal more.

His heart starts hammering when they reach the highway. The familiar roads leading home make his body flush cold and hot. He shoves his hands in his pockets, takes them out again, folds his arms, shifts uncomfortably in his seat. The urge to get out and walk rises to a fever pitch. Will needs to do something, anything, before his anxiety tears him apart.

Strange, because Will doesn't recognize home when he sees it. He stares at the little house in the field detachedly. Even as Pollard pulls off the road into the driveway, Will responds as if approaching a crime scene. He reads his property to create a composite of a killer (*an isolationist with social anxieties and neurotic tendencies. Someone who likes to view the world from afar. Has no idea how to create connections with other people except to*

kill). He fingers the door handle in anticipation and is plagued with a flashback of Abigail's ear in his sink.

(This is a terrible idea.)

Pollard doesn't even have the car in park before Will's door is open and he is walking towards the door. The amount of open space here is dizzying, disorienting; he doesn't even bother to look. He charges the front door and nearly has a panic attack when the knob won't turn. His hands fumble for the keys that aren't in his pocket, and then they fly to the space above the frame where the spare usually hangs.

"I can get the door, sir," Pollard says. Will doesn't dignify him with a response. He's too busy searching for the spare.

(This is a terrible idea.)

The door creaks open. Pollard withdraws his hand, key grasped between his two fingers. Will snatches the key from the agent's fingers. "Thank you," he mutters, stomping inside. He slams the door in Pollard's face.

He still doesn't feel at home. The house belongs to someone else, someone Will knew once but doesn't know anymore. They have similar interests, similar hobbies, and similar tastes. Whoever lives here doesn't worry about the dark though. The person who lives here leaves the blinds splayed and welcomes the openness of the fields.

Will closes his eyes and collapses against the door. He waits to feel the rush of fur and warm breath against his palms. Nothing comes: the house is terrifyingly empty. The dogs don't live here anymore. He doesn't live here anymore.

The sound of the floor creaking slashes through his ragged breathing. Will eyes snap open and he peers through the house in desperation. Apparently he's not as alone as he thought.

Pollard is making his rounds of the property; Will can see him through the windows. He clenches his chattering teeth. Hannibal wouldn't have planned a housewarming for him, would he?

(They cleared out everything that could be used as a weapon during the investigation: it had better not be Hannibal.)

Will creeps through the house towards the sounds of the creaking. He catches sight of a silhouette rounding the kitchen counter, coming to stand over the sink.

A camera flashes. Will sees red.

Freddie Lounds looks up from the sink in surprise. She smiles at the sight of him. "Mr. Graham," her eyes gleaming diabolically, "Welcome home."

Happy reading!

Happy Housewarming

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

This chapter went through several rewrites this week, but it still feels scattered to me. Granted, Will is pretty scattered right now. I hope it fits tonally with the rest of the story. This will be a section I'll have to return to in the future.

The line in italics from The Wasteland translates as ‘desolate and void the sea’ (from Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde).

Dear readers, thank you so much for your kind attention. Please, enjoy!

“Looking in the heart of light, the silence.

Öd’ und leer das Meer.”

~*The Wasteland* (I 41-42)

Chapter Twenty-Three: Happy Housewarming

Freddie folds her hands around her small point-and-shoot like a magician about to perform sleight of hand. Will wishes her camera would burst into flames just from being stared at, but the device stubbornly refuses to immolate. Freddie notices and bites back a smile, maintaining her candor, “I’d apologize for stopping in unannounced. Unfortunately, Jack Crawford made it clear he doesn’t appreciate my presence.”

Will doesn’t even begin to engage with her. He’s already retreated so far within himself that he can barely hear her speaking. Freddie’s voice comes to him from the surface of the water and reaches his ears warbled, distorted, and waterlogged.

“You don’t appreciate my trespassing either, do you, Mr. Graham?”

The words leap from his mouth before he can catch them: “Get out.”

Freddie smiles. She's expecting this, and that makes their encounter all the more enjoyable. "I was surprised to learn that you were being sent home. Your case is still waiting to be overturned."

Will wishes he could walk away, but he legs are stuck where they are. Foreign as his surroundings feel, this is his house, and he will be damned if Freddie Lounds sends him running. "There's a federal agent outside."

"And yet you're not sounding the alarm."

She's called his bluff. Will tilts his head behind a layer of curls, causing his glasses to slide just enough down the bridge of his nose that Freddie's face blurs out of focus. Feeling her smile is only marginally less infuriating than seeing her smile.

"I don't think you want to have me escorted off the property just yet."

His response is a low growl, "You don't know what I want."

Freddie's interest rises ten-fold. He's thrown her a bone somehow – in his tone, in his words, in his stance - and she's not going to stop chewing until she reaches the marrow. "I think I have an idea," she sets her hands on the countertop. The open camera lens bears down on him in his periphery. "We're alone, unarmed, in a kitchen. Quite a bit of blood and this would be déjà vu all over again."

"I didn't kill Abigail Hobbs," Will doesn't mind her quoting him on that.

Freddie's pause tells him she has no intention of using those words in her next article though. "You didn't mount her on that stag's head," she agrees, "but you still cannot account for your whereabouts when she was murdered."

"I *didn't* kill-"

Will slams his mouth shut. He doesn't have to defend himself against her. Freddie is goading him into giving himself away, and he refuses her play her games. Admitting defeat is the lesser of two evils at the moment. Will marches proudly towards the back door. Pollard is no doubt closer there than at the front.

Freddie tries to regain control of the situation. "Guilty or not," she turns to watch Will but doesn't dare try to stop him, "you are going to be released. Jack Crawford is not going to leave his favourite profiler in a psychiatric facility, no matter how much you might benefit from it."

His hand is stayed by the sudden creak of floorboards behind him. Freddie has lunged in spite of herself; she knows she's fighting a losing battle and needs to get a few more strikes in before the bell. "The real question is: are you ready to be released into a world that still believes you murdered Abigail Hobbs?"

Will gives her a fraction of time. His breath gets caught on a lump in his throat. The world is too big to think about at the moment, filled with all manner of awful things, and

Freddie Lounds is only the least dangerous.

She's lulled by his stillness and keeps talking, "I can help you ease the transition. You need someone who can tell your story."

"And why should that someone be you?"

"Because I know you, Mr. Graham. I know how much you cared about Abigail Hobbs, how you would never hurt her. I can show people just how unfathomable it is for you to have killed her." Freddie starts to make her way towards him, "You could use some good press right now. Let me tell everyone who you really are, Mr. Graham."

His hate for Freddie Lounds notwithstanding, Will would rather be in Baltimore than let anyone know who he really is. "I'd rather see you go to hell, Miss Lounds."

Will opens the door. Tosses his head at Pollard to call him inside. The agent responds with militant efficiency, marching up the back steps and into the house.

Freddie's face falls. She lets her mouth hang for the briefest of moments. Will knows: he's pushed his glasses back up towards his eyes so he can watch. Seeing Pollard put Lounds in handcuffs is a small consolation for all the miseries he's suffered today. "I don't care what everyone thinks," he assures her.

Her face resets itself, first to a smirk and then to stone, as Pollard recites her Miranda rights. "You should care, Mr. Graham," she lets herself be marched out the door, hesitating only when she passes by Will, "You never know what they might be led to believe."

His homecoming, already uncomfortable, is ruined afterwards. Jack sends groceries later with another agent, but Will barely notices. He's too busy trying to overcome his disquiet by getting reacquainted with the house. Every weary floorboard and crack in the drywall. The scents of old paper and damp wood. He throws open the windows and lets the breeze foxtrot through the rooms. There's an icy bite to the wind, but Will doesn't care. He has the great joy of feeling completely recovered for a moment before he's confronted by the sink again.

(Freddie Lounds couldn't resist the opportunity to photograph Abigail's first final resting place.)

Will surveys the space, forgetting where and when he is. There should be snow on the ground; his breath was fog in the air. Hannibal Lecter was the first person he called about Abigail's ear, because Will could still taste the doctor's fingers in the back of his throat.

He searches the windows for answers, but the sheer vastness of the outside causes him to shrink. He closes his eyes, waits for a voice to ground him, but no one's around to provide him with a port of call. Lampman speaks to him through a fog of memory; she's as distorted as Lounds was earlier, perhaps even more so, because Will has drifted so far from her in such

a short span of time. Yesterday, Lampman had positioned herself as a barrier, a guardian, a gatekeeper, not to imprison but to protect. Now, Will's shoved even Alana out of reach. He is alone in the wilderness, stalking a predator through the dark forest. A man-stag with Hannibal's face bides his time until his final confrontation with Will.

He closes the windows, shuts the blinds, stands for a very long while in his dim, musty house. Phantom breezes swirl over his skin and set the hairs on the back of his neck to stand on end. He's been outrunning the events of the past twenty-four hours until now, but the inertia has finally gotten the better of him. Will's head is a maelstrom of thoughts, feelings, and fantasies: few good, most bad, some evil. He has worked so long to come home, and yet Hannibal's claws have never felt deeper.

(Freddie Lounds is his mouthpiece, Jack Crawford is his hand, and Will is the good doctor's puppet dancing on a fraying string, waiting for the final snap.)

"You can't reach me here," Will tells the empty room. He shuts his eyes and takes several deep calming breaths. Lampman's voice parses through his jumbled thoughts. She prompts him to focus on his own feelings, to separate himself. Will retreats into the darkest corners of his mind, unwittingly dropping himself into a Baltimore flashback that feels so real it hurts.

He shakes himself back into his living room, throws open the blinds, and starts turning on the lights. The room looks even less familiar under the harsh glow and harsher shadows. Will can't stand the sight of it for another minute, not with Baltimore still on his mind. He grabs his coat and storms outside.

The sun dips low on the horizon, making the sky appear even wider than it already is. Will's head falls back in reverence, drinking in as much as he can of the view without bothering to think of its dimensions. He can finally breathe and think without being haunted by all the terrible places he's been. The nightmares are a distant memory. He is free: he is finally free.

Dizziness overwhelms him at the revelation. Will's legs go weak. He ends up on his knees in the wet grass staring at his little house. The light stares through the open windows, holding strong against the gathering dark. It sails over the fields, a boat on calm waters.

Finally, a vision of home he recognizes.

The strength in his legs returns shortly thereafter, and Will takes to walking his usual route through the fields. He keeps his eyes on home to stave off the disorientation that the wide open space inevitably brings. As the sun fades, only the silhouette of the house remains, burning like a beacon in the night. Will lets the light wash through him as he stretches his legs past the length of his old chains, as he runs his hands over the trunks of the trees. He diffuses into the darkness, relishing the bliss of letting go rather than the pain of holding on.

The imagined sound of dogs barking bolsters him. Will dares to take a step into the thicket of trees, to tempt another panic attack after his failed flight from Bethesda. He casts a worried glance over his shoulder, reminding himself that the house is still there, before immersing himself entirely into the darkness.

He stops short, panic immediately rising: first from visions of Baltimore, second from the feeling that he's being watched.

Will tries to tell himself that he's just being paranoid, but the feeling intensifies with every step. There is someone with him in the trees, someone quiet, someone *interested*. He stops to turn back. Panic is overpowering his senses, threatening to crush what limited sensory perception he has.

Shadows shift in his peripheral vision; Will freezes. He remembers this trick from his illness but can't trust the memory. The feeling that he is not alone is just too strong. He slowly lifts his gaze from the ground to greet the darkness at his side.

At first, all he sees are the shadows of trees, but then one spasms, turns, and stares at Will with glowing red eyes.

Happy reading!

The Tell-Tale Art

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

I am so excited to post this chapter! The story really unfolded for me this week, which feels great because of how scattered the last installment felt.

Some notes about this chapter – coyotes, to my understanding, do hunt in groups but more commonly in pairs. Also, and I've been meaning to point this out since I introduced the character something like ten chapters ago, Agent Quick-Draw's Converse shoes are a shout-out to Ned's red Chucks in Pushing Daisies.

In my excitement to post this chapter, I forgot to write a Happy Birthday to Mads Mikkelsen!

Readers, thank you! I wish you all the best wherever you are and whatever you're doing.

"I think we are in rats' alley

Where the dead men lost their bones."

~*The Wasteland* (II 115-116)

Chapter Twenty-Four: The Tell-Tale Art

The fever can't have come back, but Will is so sure he's still sick that he almost goes back to the house. Almost. His feet know better than his head does at the moment and he starts off in the direction of the spectral stag-man.

Shadows start to converge from all sides; Will ignores them. He ignores the drawl of Chilton's voice in his head; the dreamy, druggy quicksand pool of memories rising to meet

him should he stop. He quickens his pace towards the glowing red eyes, allowing his vision to tunnel until his whole world is Hannibal.

"Dr. Lecter!" Will can see the doctor's high forehead, ink black in the night. The stag is hungry. His red eyes narrow before ripping away, and his shadow takes its place with all the others.

Will's chest is pounding. This can't be real, Baltimore least of all, and yet he can still see movement in front of him. There are footsteps rustling in the dark alongside his. He can feel someone watching his quick return to madness, someone who wants to see him scrambling in the dark. Will catches brief glimpses of movement in his periphery, but when he looks, the trees morph into bars and all he sees is Chilton, then Hannibal, then Chilton again, smiling at him.

He grinds to a halt; the world continues to spin around him at a breakneck pace. "No, no, no..." the red-eyed shadow is flicking across his vision, while Chilton's phantom drawl makes his ears ring. Will covers his face with one hand and grips the trunk of a tree to keep from keeling over.

There are no voices here to ground him except those he'd rather forget. When Chilton has finished taunting him, half-forgotten sessions with Hannibal return in a flurry. Will hasn't been understood so well in his entire life, and no matter how much he tries to deny it, he still feels a kinship with the good doctor that bridges their differences. The monster in the trees doesn't scare him half as much as the desire to join, to *become*.

(It would be so easy.)

Collapse comes so easily to Will. He can lie to Jack and Alana but here, now, alone, he is reminded of how shattered he is. There aren't words to describe what Hannibal's done, only ragged breaths and sobs that shred the night like tissue paper. The world is so fragile. Lecter is the only thing that gives Will's life any structure, and yet he's the most willing to set the world ablaze just to see how it burns.

Will feels foolish: not just for the crying, though that's part of it. He knows what his visions are telling him. If only he had encephalitis. The shadows are his brain's way of letting his body know what kind of a mistake he's made. He should never have left Bethesda; he hasn't even left Baltimore yet. And Hannibal is waiting, mountainous, a great goliath. Will doesn't stand a chance.

As if in response, the wind rustles through the tree. The gnashing of naked limbs masks the weight of footsteps, but just barely. Will's ears are hypersensitive. His body wants to keep panicking, because panic is the only state it knows anymore. He rises shakily, heavy as he is, and stares into the abyss.

Nothing moves. Baltimore stays inside his mind instead of launching out of it. Whoever is in the trees is real, not imagined, and they are very good at hiding. Their gaze, however, is palpable. Will's whole body tingles from a disembodied stare.

“Come out,” he demands, scrubbing away his tears. They’ve seen enough. When they don’t respond immediately, Will says again, louder, “Come out!”

Will’s terrified brain registers the movement as the rustle of insects, just as it did during his flight from Bethesda. He steels himself for the sight of a monster, only to be disappointed when someone all too human strides into view from behind the trees.

He scoffs, “I didn’t recognize you without your gun.”

“I could take it out, if you want.”

“Third time’s a charm,” Will breathes. He can’t see what her right hand’s doing and is about ready to jump out of his skin. The only logical response is to take his frustrations out on her. “Jack said you would be discrete.”

“I was being discrete. You’re the one who called me out.”

“You were following me.”

“I thought you were running away,” she tosses her shoulders, “Again.”

“Where am I going to go?”

“Same place you were headed at Bethesda. Just a few more steps in between.”

Will considers her very carefully. She’s so much clearer to him in the dark than she ever was in the light. He finally connects the pain in his knuckles to the welt on her cheek. “I punched you in the face.”

The way she agrees makes it sound like he just hit her again, “Yep.”

“I wasn’t trying to run away,” he changes the subject.

“Uh huh,” she toes at the ground, a cat stretching her claws. Will expects the prickles of a threat to move though him, but she barely registers. If anything, it’s her knowing glare that scares him more than her movements. She’s an agent with a daily kill quota. Her body needs to find itself in a fight or else it grows restless. Will’s not a target for her physically. Mentally though, he can sense her calculating. She heard him shout for Lecter, and now she’s calculating the possibility that he’s experiencing another psychotic break.

Will can tell without looking that the odds are stacking against him in her head.

He redirects their stilted exchange back to her, “That isn’t standard FBI issue footwear.”

Even in the dark, her seafoam high-tops are plainly visible. Will doesn’t know how he missed them during his run. “Crawford said you had a thing about eye contact,” she folds her arms across her chest. Her hands are empty, but her fingers roll themselves instinctively into fists. The menace in her voice is contained but chilling, “I figured you should always know where I’m standing.”

The agent goes back to doing a half-decent job at staying hidden afterwards. Will can still sense her. She has the presence of a coyote, one who killed and ate her hunting partner, and Will's caught up in the opposition of her nature despite himself. The burden of regret is countered with the necessity of survival. All Will can see is Hannibal slaughtering Abigail, since the decision was born of a similar inner conflict.

He doesn't go back to the house right away then. He steps out from the thicket but hugs the tree line, testing his limits but keeping the house in full view. Baltimore grows distant, as do his sessions with Hannibal, though they are quick to pounce when he least expects. A patch of clearing, a slice of moonlight, and he returns to the basement, staring at Hannibal's satisfied face through the bars of his cafe.

By the time he reaches the back porch, Will's toes have gone numb and his thighs ache from shivering. He's sufficiently distracted from the unease of being home.

Until she shows up again, sneakier this time, and lets herself inside to sweep the premises.

Will almost heads back for the trees. If not for his raging territorialism, the desperate need to have his own space again, he might have spent the night in the fields. Instead, he charges after her into the kitchen, opting to ignore her until she goes away.

He ignores her so well that he doesn't notice her standing at the doorway to the kitchen until long after she's appeared.

"What?" Will demands with a sigh. He doesn't want to know, but she's staring too intently not to ask.

She glances quickly to his right and then back to him. Will wouldn't notice if she didn't do it twice in rapid succession. He looks to find the object of her scrutiny: his fillet knife has been returned and rests on the cutting board nearby. Jack's idea, no doubt, of a peace offering. There's no way for Will to touch it without lighting the agent's short fuse. He can either leave it on the counter as a threat or touch it as a warning. Hannibal hasn't given him any other role to play except a murderer.

"No one could cut a throat with a fillet knife," and then, intelligently, "I didn't mean it like that."

The agent's eyes still dance between him and the weapon. Her fear has disappeared. "Oh, I know."

Will's thrown momentarily by how casual she sounds about it all. They might as well be talking about the weather instead of his reputation for killing people in kitchens. "Then why are you so nervous?" he accuses. She curls her shoulders to absorb the blow. "I didn't kill those people."

"I know."

She doesn't, but for a second, she can manage to sound like she does.

The limits of her self-control are so visible. Will's not sure if it's him or Hannibal that compels him to tease her to brink. "Then why are you so scared right now?"

"I'm not-"

He lets his hand slip in the direction of the knife. Just like that, the agent's fear bubbles over. Her voice breaks, her hand slips to her side arm, and her weight shifts to her back leg in anticipation of an attack.

Will brings his hand back to his side. She scowls at him, dropping her arms but not the chip on her shoulder. "I'm not scared," a tremble runs through her, "not of you."

"Of dying?"

"Please," condescension disgusts her more than the accusation.

"Of killers?" he laughs, "You should consider another line of work."

"Killers don't bother me," she shrugs, her calm returning at least. "I can deal with killers. And killing." Will can see the lives she's taken so clearly and regards them with the same level of comfort that she does. "You're not a killer though, or you're not like any killer I've met before. One of the two."

"Why?"

"You can always tell," she corrects herself, "Well, of course, *you* can. I mean the royal 'you' though. You can always tell when someone's about to attack. There's a tipping point. It's visible, especially with psychopaths."

"You've been around a lot of psychopaths."

"Never one like you. Which means you're either not a psychopath or you are one of the smartest psychopaths I've ever met."

She spends a long time cataloguing his tics in silence, trying to memorize him, to understand him. Will retreats, averting his eyes and blanking his expression until his body's an empty shell and his mind feels very far away.

The agent recognizes his blankness, nodding in unspoken agreement. "When you strike," not if – when, "I'm not going to see you coming."

"It's not you I'm after," Will offers exhaustedly, hoping to curtail some of her aggression.

Unsurprisingly, the statement has the exact opposite effect. The agent's fear rises again, "But I am standing in the way." And she isn't going to be afforded the same courtesies

in Will's crusade as Jack or, if emotional assault can be considered a mercy, Alana.

There being nothing more to say, the agent starts to make her way out of the house. She takes the back door so that she can keep Will in her eye line as she goes. He breathes a sigh of relief when she's out on the porch. Will isn't sure who's more scared of whom: he might be unpredictable, but she's predictable in all the ways that matter.

He puts the fillet knife in a drawer when the muffled sound of a ringing phone reaches his ears. The Agent speaks quickly, hangs up, and throws the back door open.

"Crawford wants to see you," she tells him. The menace returns to her voice, "The Ripper's ripped again."

Happy reading!

What the Thunder Said

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

At last – part of the thunder's speech from the poem. I've been looking forward to pulling these sections for a while.

Readers, my deepest thanks. I hope you have been enjoying yourselves!

"DA

Datta: what have we given?

My friend, blood shaking my heart

The awful daring of moment's surrender"

~*The Wasteland* (V 400-403)

Chapter Twenty-Five: What The Thunder Said

"The performance has reached a whole new level of gratuity."

"Will."

"Three bodies at once! There wasn't a wall in the room that wasn't blood-spattered..."

"Will, please."

"I knew he had other victims, but he must have bled several more people to get the blood he needed."

"William."

He huffs a breath of antiseptic and pollen, pastel walls and starched sheets. If he had anything in his stomach, Will would be vomiting. His head rollicks with blood and pain and torment. Hannibal knew exactly what he was doing when he carved those people up.

No, not Hannibal. The Ripper.

"William."

Blink. The hospital room hemorrhages into focus and finally stills in his aching vision. Will scrubs his face out of embarrassment, disorientation, the sudden thrust into complete awareness. The scar from Jack's bullet throbs on his upper arm. He's back: before Baltimore, after Minnesota. Abigail Hobbs is dead. Hannibal is a murderer. His brain is on fire. There is so much blood...

"Um..." there's one question he needs to ask before all the others. "What...what time is it?"

"It's eleven-thirty," Lampman informs him coolly. "P.M. Do you know where you are, Will?"

"Hospital," he drinks another mouthful of the ammonia-air. "Not Baltimore...?"

That shouldn't have been a question, but Will's worried he's going to blink again and find himself waking up after electroconvulsive therapy. It's perfectly obvious that he's not in Baltimore. The rooms are nicer here, cleaner and newer, and it's Lampman who's in bed, unrestrained, not a mental patient. She's as patient with him as ever, no matter how wane her recovery has left her. "No, Will: not Baltimore. Do you remember coming here?"

Will hangs his head in shame. He's supposed to be getting better, not worse. "No," he can't even recall the events that compelled him here. Images of a bloodstained walls and contorted bodies flicker through his mind's eye, but Will can't command the pendulum's swing to those moments. He's disassociating, and this time there is no illness to blame. "I don't think I drove."

"You were escorted by an agent," Lampman informs him. He's not sure if the slowness of her speech is for him or from her drug regimen.

"I was at a crime scene."

"Yes. You're clearly disturbed by it."

"It was disturbing...I think. I don't remember. Much. I don't remember much."

"Will," Lampman's voice regains some of its former strength. "Normally, I wouldn't try to curtail your body's natural inclinations, but normally, I'm not on morphine. Would you stand or sit so that I can focus, please?"

He stops pacing, not even having realized he was moving in the first place. Everything is spiralling so madly out of control that it feels odd to take charge over his body. Lampman

notices without being told, “Just breathe, Will. We’re not going anywhere.”

“I might be. I just walked off a crime scene. Jack already thinks I’m unstable. I should just commit myself.”

“You’re still my patient.”

“I’m losing my mind.”

“No, you’re not. Your mind is under your control.”

“I’m disassociating!”

“You’re not disassociating. You remember the crime scene. You were speaking about it when you came in the room.”

“I don’t even know how I got here.”

“It will come to you. Will, please,” her eyelids flutter. Lampman pinches the bridge of her nose. She can’t say anything more.

Will’s back flares with pain sympathetically. He’s overlooked her injuries and not even the morphine can hold the burn at bay any longer. Lampman’s polished veneer is cracking from the pressure. She gasps, winces, and when she finally settles, her bottom lip shakes from exertion.

“H-h-how are you?” he mutters, embarrassed.

“As well as can be expected,” she allows herself a rare flash of vulnerability. “How are you, Will?”

He almost cries. “I’ve been better. I shouldn’t have come here. Aren’t...aren’t visiting hours over?”

“You were very insistent.”

“I vaguely remember that,” the veil covering the night begins to part in his mind. Will allows himself to breathe. “I didn’t know where else to go.”

Lampman nods. The movement depletes what little energy she has. “Tell me about your day.”

The pendulum swings back easily to the previous night: the phone call with Jack, the arrival at the BAU, the fight this morning with Alana, returning home. Will’s remaining memories start to fall in line thereafter. He’s able to recall the drive to the crime, the smell of blood, the sight of the bodies, and none of it instigates another panic attack. His narration is cold, clinical, and Lampman’s so quiet throughout that he thinks she’s passed out cold until she finally speaks.

“Dr. Lecter?”

Will's whole body goes cold. "What about Dr. Lecter?"

"You said Dr. Lecter did all this?"

He searches the floor for answers. "No, no," tremors rattle from the tips of his toes to the top of his head. "No, the Chesapeake Ripper."

"You said Dr. Lecter," Lampman's eyes are open to the thinnest of slits, but her gaze still strikes him to the core. "You said he did this."

"I must have misspoke," Will's panic is on the rise again. "I must have..."

Mapping his cognition takes time, but Will finally reconstructs his thoughts from the crime scene. He wasn't panicking because of the blood. Well, he wasn't panicking *exclusively* because of the blood. He misattributed the Chesapeake Ripper's crimes to Hannibal Lecter. Gasping for breath, Will wrecks his memory for any indication that he voiced his error to Jack. The older agent wouldn't hesitate locking him up if he can't work without letting his vendetta get in the way of the case. Thankfully, Will only remembers storming away from the crime scene and coming to the hospital to see Lampman. Either Jack was being merciful or Will kept his mouth shut.

Still, the thought is alarming. The connection between Hannibal and the Ripper seems even now so strong, so finite. Will can't distinguish between the two killers. "I made an association," he admits, "between Lecter and the Chesapeake Ripper."

She sees through him so easily. "Sounds like you're still making the association."

"I am."

"Why?"

"There are...similarities."

"What similarities?"

"They're both insane. They're both theatrical. They're both elusive."

"But?"

"The Chesapeake Ripper is a special kind of psychopath. He is atrocity personified," Will pauses, searching for words and finding none. "I don't know what Hannibal is. I know he's curious." Beyond that, Will's impressions grow hazy. The image of Lecter is diffuse and unclear in his mind. "I can see his features but not the motives."

"What about the Chesapeake Ripper?"

"I see the motive, not the features," he laughs lightly. "They make quite a pair actually."

“They complete each other,” Lampman notes. She sounds distant, dreamy, but no less attentive to what Will is saying. “Could the symmetry be compelling your association?”

“I don’t know. I uh...I think I wanted your opinion, actually.”

“Ah,” her eyelids fall, “That would stand to reason.”

“I shouldn’t have come.”

“No, I’m glad you came. I wish I was better equipped to see you, though I’m not sure I would be much help. Your suspicions about Lecter are your own, Will, as are your impressions of the Ripper. Is it possible that they are one in the same?”

“No,” he shakes his head and hopes the lingering doubt will crumble away. It doesn’t: the association is ironclad in Will’s mind. “No, they can’t be.”

Lampman says nothing. Will senses her silence isn’t merely from exhaustion. He knows exactly what she’s thinking. “I shouldn’t have gone back to work,” he agrees.

“Why did you?”

“I thought I was better,” he wants to say, but the lie is an affront to Lampman. She’s the first person to listen, to believe, or at the very least accept. Will can’t bear the thought of feeding her a line. She deserves better. “I wanted to be accessible again.”

“To Dr. Lecter?”

He nods, his mouth having forgotten how to form the word, “Yes.”

“Why?”

It sounds stupid when he says it to her. “I want to expose him.”

“To lure him out,” she exhales slowly, sighing as much as she is fighting pain. “You are playing a dangerous game.”

“I can’t afford to play safe.”

“Can you afford to play at all?”

“I can’t afford not to.”

Lampman can’t dispute this. She is overcome. Her eyelids twitch skywards and the breath leaves her chest. Will’s lower back throbs with the white hot heat of her wounds. He moves toward the bed, towards her fumbling hands. The control for the morphine pump has fallen just out of her reach. “Here,” he presses it into her palm.

“No, no,” her usual poise is lost underneath pain induced tremors. She drops the pump control and takes hold of Will’s hand instead. Her touch burns: one part breakthrough pain, two parts Will’s social anxiety. His fingers hand dumbly in her grip, brain struggling to

remember proper procedure when it comes to physical contact. The grinding of his knuckles finally jumpstarts his memory. Will forces his fingers to straighten and then grips her hand right back.

The pain in his back decreases. Will is at once centred squarely in his own body, his own experience, only to have Lampman's crushing grasp draw him back inside her. He ebbs and flows like the tide, in pain and outside of it, stopping only when he finally place why exactly she feels so wrong. Lampman is only lying in the bed because of him. Her pain is a response to the problem he poses.

"I'm sorry," he mutters, more to the floor than to her. "I'm so sorry. For everything."

"You have nothing to be sorry for," Lampman musters through clenched teeth. She hunches over to hold in all the agony looking to tear its way out of her body.

Will holds her hand even more tightly. He wants to reflect all the strength she needs, but his mirrors feel cracked, dusty. Worse, Hannibal continues to insinuate himself. He's present in Lampman's frail form, the hunch of her back, the hitch of her breath. Will sees the doctor's machinations written into the moment, and he can't possibly hate himself more.

The pain is gone as quickly as it came: Lampman finally releases a breath and sinks back against the pillows. Her fingers spring from Will's hand. He loosens his grip but can't bring himself to let go. There's something comforting about being needed. He's spent so long using his gift to see into dark places that Will has forgotten how to see the goodness he can offer.

(Lampman saw it from the beginning, and unlike Hannibal, she wasn't looking to corrupt it.)

He leaves pieces of himself wrapped up in her fingertips when he finally gets the strength to pry her hand away.

"Will?"

"Yes?"

Lampman doesn't have the strength to open her eyes. She raises a hand off the bed, finger raised. Her lips quiver with the effort of speaking but not a sound comes out.

Will hangs his head just as her expression breaks. Her weeping is stilted and quiet against the silence of the room. She knows. She's always known. All that's left is to apologize and say goodbye. Her tears do both.

"It's the damn morphine," she whispers at long last, "though I can't say I'm pleased about this."

"That makes two of us," Will admits in just as quiet a tone. He's not looking forward to what comes next.

Lampman turns to look at him through red-rimmed eyes. Her old spark returns for a brief moment before fading. Will runs his hand over hers and this time doesn't feel the burn.

Neither of them needs to say a word.

Happy reading!

Progressing Towards Entropy

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

I don't know what came over me last week – I experienced a creative burst in the kitchen, but I sat down and stared dumbfoundedly for hours on end at my word processor. This chapter gave me a lot of trouble. Work didn't help matters much either, but I'm happy to say that the rest of the fic is falling into place. There should only be a few more weeks before the conclusion!

Readers, oh, readers: I thank you! I hope your lives have been treating you well, and that you enjoy this installment. Cheers!

"HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME"

~*The Wasteland* (II 168-169)

Chapter Twenty-Six: Progressing Towards Entropy

Will steps out of Lampman's room to a scuffle in the hallway. "Mr. Graham," Freddie Lounds calls from behind her camera. She's being pushed away by the agent in seafoam shoes. "Looking for another psychiatrist to scapegoat for murder?"

The agent walks a fine line between detaining Freddie and using excessive force. Freddie hisses about her rights, "*Get your hands off me.*" She finally gives up, throwing herself away from the fight. "I'll be contacting your supervisor," Freddie assures the agent.

"You're trespassing."

"You've just assaulted me."

"No, she hasn't," Will says, recognizing all the aggression being withheld in the agent's stance. "You'll know when she assaults you, Freddie."

“Assaulted by a federal officer and threatened by a convicted murderer. Any other incriminating statements you’d care to make, Mr. Graham?”

“Leave,” the agent scolds her.

Freddie snarls, but she turns on a heel and storms away. Assured that Freddie’s leaving, the agent walks after Will.

“Hey!” Freddie turns back suddenly. She’s stopped by one of the guards from Lampman’s door this time. “My SD card. Give it back.”

The agent ignores her.

“My camera SD card,” Freddie says, louder this time, “That’s my personal property: give it back.” The agent still hasn’t stopped walking. Freddie springs against the guard. “Agent!”

The agent stops. She twirls on one heel and lets her hands dangle by her hips. “What SD card?” she asks, and then, before Freddie has time to answer, “Get her the hell out of here.”

For the second time in twenty-four hours, Will has the satisfaction of seeing Freddie Lounds be dragged away by a federal officer. The blogger fails to maintain her usual composure now that her pictures have been confiscated. She is every kind of irate; Will catalogues each one to review later, after she’s posted another slanderous article.

He plunges into the hospital quiet in the opposite direction. The agent walks alongside him. “That’s some sleight of hand to steal from Freddie Lounds,” he mentions to the agent.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she replies. Her tone and posture give nothing away, but Will falls in step with her thrill as it bounces along the walls.

Sure enough, when they step outside, Will hears something small drop against the pavement. The agent slams her heel down hard, then kicks to clear the ground in front of her. Will watches as the tiny fragments of Freddie Lounds’s story are swept away.

The drive back to Wolf Trap begins as a silent affair. Will is too busy thinking about how to take control of the vehicle to speak. His limitless imagination can’t fathom an outcome that doesn’t end in bullets...and yet.

“You’re not just handy with a gun, are you?” Will wonders aloud. Reading her has started to reveal a myriad of hidden talents that she possesses. However, he’s starting to doubt his imagination in lieu of conflating the Ripper and Hannibal. Will wants to be sure.

“FBI training covers unarmed combat,” she replies simply, cryptically. Will’s already a bit of a wild card in her mind already; she’s holding whatever advantage she might have close to her chest.

Will calls her bluff, “Pick pocketing wasn’t covered when I was at the Academy.”

“You were probably just taking the wrong classes.”

“How long have you worked for Jack?”

“Since your release,” she replies. “Jack needed someone to keep an eye on you at Bethesda, so he hired outside his usual candidate pool.”

“You’re not outside Jack’s usual candidate pool: you’re cut from the same cloth of cage-rattlers and troublemakers that he usually hires from. Agents who know how to not get caught,” Will doesn’t mean to be forthcoming, but the talk with Lampman has loosened his tongue. “Strange that you’re assigned to a security detail.”

“I don’t want to be on the Ripper taskforce.”

“You’d rather shadow a disgraced former profiler.”

The agent takes a moment to consider her answer, and in so doing, gives herself away to Will. She’s as comfortable as can be with her own violence, but other people’s actions make her uneasy. The Ripper scares her far more than Will does.

(Which is still only half as much as Hannibal scares Will.)

“I’d rather shadow the devil I know than chase the one I don’t.”

“You think you know me?”

“Better than I know the Ripper.”

Will shakes his head to clear it, “Nobody knows the Ripper.”

“Don’t you?”

He’s so desperate to say the doctor’s name out loud that it almost passes between his lips. Will presses his forehead against the window, “I don’t know the Ripper.”

She raises a brow, “But you know your psychiatrist? Dr. Lecter?”

The abyss stares back at him through the window, but Will’s not sure whose eyes he’s looking into. Hannibal and the Ripper are bound too tightly. Their images are united against Will in the night. He closes his eyes: Hannibal stands outside his bars in Baltimore, a shadow clinging to him. Will makes the light dim in his imagining to clarify the darkness he sees on Hannibal. Unfortunately, as the image becomes darker, the more difficult it is to see the good doctor. His home is in the shadows. Will’s eyes can only hope to adjust to his darkness.

“Stick to the devil you know, Agent,” he tells her. “I’ll stick to mine.”

“Why him?” she asks. “Why Hannibal Lecter?”

Will pulls his eyes from the window, suspicious. "Did Jack put you up to this?"
"Agent Crawford doesn't put me up to things."

His heart skips several beats. "Did I say something or do something...?"
Her eyes flit towards him for just a moment.

(Yes, he did.)

Will's fear bubbles to the surface. If the agent notices, she does so without looking. "I was having a panic attack," which is as much of the truth as he's willing to tell, "I didn't know what I was saying."

She doesn't believe him in the slightest, but at least she has the decency not to articulate it. Her eyes begin roaming the inside of the vehicle as well as the road, calculating once more.

Will ignores her.

Will also ignores Jack's call – *singular* – and only listens to the message with two fingers of whiskey in his system: he is not returning to work for the foreseeable future, Alana is bringing the dogs by later, and then there's a lot of silence on the other line. Will interprets that to be an apology and accepts by deleting the message. He then pours himself another two fingers of whiskey but ends up staring at the drink instead, lost in his thoughts.

He doesn't like what lies at the bottom of the glass. The alcohol usually loosens his thinking. Connections grow diffuse: they peel apart into dust clouds and resettle into the proper formations. Will doesn't like that his thoughts have betrayed him so readily, wonders if this is another trick on Hannibal's part, and then realizes that this can't be the doctor's doing. Will's played this trick on himself. Tonight the ties that bind Hannibal and the Ripper only grow stronger: Hannibal and the Ripper finish each other's murders and hide each other's bodies in Will's mind. The connections sharpen the less he looks, until Will's constructed the two into a mighty precipice that stretches every inch of his limitless imagination.

Dawn breaks through the window. Will watches the sunlight climb up his kitchen walls before dumping his untouched drink in the sink. He's now an unwelcome stranger in his house and his mind.

The dogs help. They leap from Alana's car and surround Will in a desperate circle. He crouches among them, meeting their eyes, burying his hands in their fur. His thoughts go quiet at long last. Will internalizes the dogs' stability, forgetting about the recent connection he's made.

He looks at the dogs instead of her, "I didn't want you to come."

Alana stares at the house instead of him, "I got that."

“I still don’t want you to be here.”

“I get that too.”

She still doesn’t leave. Will ruffles Winston’s fur. “You’re here to say ‘I told you so’.”

“That would be callous,” Alana tells his upstairs windows. “I’m here to imply it.”

“Message received.”

She can change the subject then: “I have their things in the back.”

Will stands up, dusts himself off. The dogs fill him up as the universe bottoms him out. “I can get them.”

“I’m helping,” Alana assures him. “Unless there’s some threat to my life that I should know about?”

“Not your life.”

She purses her lips into a thin line, resisting the urge to say something. Her willpower is not match to her passions though, not for long. “Is this your idea of chivalry, Will?”

He breaks a smile, bitter and broken, and says, “I wouldn’t call it chivalry.”

Alana makes a point of looking at him, “I was being polite.”

“Don’t be polite,” Will begs.

For a moment, she considers doing so, but her face free falls into a downtrodden expression. “I don’t want to be impolite,” she admits, more sad than angry.

They clear out the back of the car without saying much: every food dish, blanket, and toy that Alana has amassed since taking possession of Will’s brood. She helps him set up the living room and arranges the pillows in a formation Will doesn’t recognize. The dogs trail her, cling to her; they trust her movements, wait for her signals. Will stands on the sidelines and watches, adrift again in his own house.

“Thank you,” he says to the floor. “I don’t think I ever said that: thank you.”

“I told you I would,” Alana replies, playing with the space heater.

“Yes, but you didn’t have to, especially not for as long as you did. Or may have to.”

She shoves the heater aside in a fit and snaps to attention, “I can’t take this, Will. You’re talking in circles around me. What’s going on! Are you planning on disappearing?”

“I can’t plan for anything with him out there.”

Again with the paranoid rhetoric. Freedom makes him crazier than Baltimore ever could.

Alana chooses to fixate on other aspects of his speech. "You mean Hannibal," she clarifies.

Will continues speaking to the floor, "You said it."

"You say it! I didn't want to talk about it before with respect to your feelings, but you clearly have no respect for mine," she folds her arms across her chest. "Hannibal Lecter is my friend and my mentor. He used to be yours too."

"I told you everything I know," he growls. Her face through the bars at Baltimore ripples in Will's mind. He's always been staring at her through the waters of Hannibal's tyranny, struggling against her grip to breathe. She hadn't believed him then and she doesn't believe him now. "He's a murderer. And a manipulator. And he has you fooled."

"I'm sorry that you're fooled! I'm sorry that you were locked up. I'm sorry that all of this happened!"

Chilton made his brain dance like a puppet on a string. "That doesn't make it right, Alana. That doesn't put him away!"

"You need to talk about this, Will. You need to resolve whatever it is compelling you to think these things."

"I did. Last night. And she didn't frame me for murder afterwards. It was very refreshing."

Alana doesn't even dignify that with a response. She bypasses his sarcasm to more productive topics, "What if you spoke to him again? With a mediator? I could be there. Jack could be there."

"He would just love that."

"He feels awful."

"Well, he should: he does kill people. He had Dr. Lampman assaulted."

Alana draws the line, "I want you to talk to Dr. Lecter. I want you well!"

Will can't help but smile, "He...likes me sick."

"I know that this is hard for you to believe," she chooses her words very, very carefully, "but Hannibal Lecter is not trying to hurt you."

All this time he's been trying to find ways to Hannibal, not to bring the doctor to him. His chance is glaring him in the face. Will's voice holds the smallest undercurrent of excitement, "I'll talk to him."

She's blindsided, utterly blindsided. It takes her a long moment to respond. "You won't be speaking to him alone."

"That is the only way I will be speaking to *him*." Lecter won't let the veil down for either Alana or Jack.

"This can't be like last time."

"It won't be," Will goes through all the motions, "I won't jump to conclusions, I won't try to run: Dr. Lecter and I will have a conversation."

He doesn't know how he remains so controlled, how he's able to conduct himself with such calm. Will attributes most of what he's feeling to exhaustion, but there's also an overwhelming sense of relief. He is looking forward to the end at long last, especially now that he knows who Dr. Lecter is.

(No, not Dr. Lecter. The Chesapeake Ripper killed those people. Lecter killed Abigail.)

"I'm not leaving you alone," Alana maintains.

Will looks at her for the first time since she arrived: her face ripples. "You already have," he wants to say, only to think better of it. He has been cruel enough to her, and if things go according to plan, fate is shaping up to be a whole lot crueller.

At least the dogs will be taken care of.

Happy reading!

The Perfect Storm

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

I saw the newest poster and release date last week. It was the best gift NBC could have given me. Never have I danced so much without music!

Me (hopping): VALIDATE MY EXCITEMENT!
Fiance: Yes.
Me (stops hopping): Thank you!

I want to wish everyone out there a happy December! Thank you, Readers, for sticking with this fic. By my calculations, there are only about four or five chapters left. I do hope to see you round till then. Until next time, please enjoy this installment! I have holiday baking to eat and friends to visit.

"There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying 'Stetson!

You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!

That corpse you planted last year in your garden,

Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?

Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?

...You! *hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,--mon frère!*'"

~*The Wasteland* (I 69-73, 76)

Chapter Twenty-Seven: The Perfect Storm

“This isn’t what I had in mind.”

In fact, the only thing keeping Will in the room are the guards stationed around the house. Pollard’s at the front door and another two agents are in his driveway. Jack’s pulled out all the stops. He knows Will won’t want to stay when he understands how this conversation is going to be handled.

“This is the only thing I have in mind,” Jack replies.

“I made a mistake.”

“And you’re not going to make it again, not if I can help it.”

“He’s not going to admit to murder if you’re in the room.”

“He’s not going to admit to murder at all. Dr. Lecter is not a murderer. I’m hoping that you’ll understand that soon.”

Winston nudges his hand; Will barely registers. His head’s filled with storm clouds and fog. The sounds from the kitchen – a whistling kettle, polite conversation – are making his palms sweat. He folds his arms to hide them from Jack. Alana’s tone is guarded, but Will can hear an undercurrent of relief. She is happy to be in Hannibal’s company, happier than he’s heard her in a long time.

Will’s whole body hurts. His anger holds him together. “Let’s get this over with.”

“No: before we do this, you need to understand something. This cannot go on.”
“I know.”

“This delusion-”

“It’s not a delusion!” Alana goes quiet in the kitchen; Lecter continues speaking lowly in his usual cordial manner. Will no longer wants to give him the satisfaction of an audience. The familiar sinking feelings of helplessness don’t spare him the agony of hate today: Will’s anger keeps him floating in complete awareness. His rage holds him to this awful moment.
“You want evidence, Jack?”
The older agent surprises him by saying, “Yes,” but then immediately cuts Will back down to size, “but you don’t.”

“I don’t need evidence.”

It’s the wrong thing to say. Jack raises a brow and hums lowly, a kind of non-committal ‘mmm-hmmm’ that rattles Will’s already rattled core. He sighs, “How many times do I have to tell you I’m not crazy before you start believing it?”

“I know that you’re not crazy, Will,” Jack says calmly. “I need you to start believing that too.”

A younger, simpler Will might have believed that. Post-Baltimore Will sees the line for exactly what it is: one more of Uncle Jack's subtle pushes to get what he wants. He poses the meeting as a benefit for Will without mentioning that he'll be reaping the greater rewards. If Will's not obsessed with catching Hannibal, he can be obsessed with catching the Ripper.

Will resolves himself. Jack wants this to end? Fine. He'll pull Hannibal's mask from his face one way or another. Will growls, "Then let's get this over with."

The intervention has an air of propriety only Hannibal can provide. Will walks into the living room he already doesn't recognize and somehow, impossibly, feels even less at home. He hasn't cleaned, but the surfaces appear shinier. The air tastes fresher. He smells tea despite not owning any. Hannibal steeps slowly into the atmosphere. Will glares at the doctor's silhouette as it breezes through the kitchen.

He can't watch as the dogs crowd Hannibal for affection.

Alana takes her place beside him. She places a hot mug into his hands, a companion to her own. "I told you I wasn't going to leave you alone with him," she says without prompting.

"Everybody was content to leave me alone before," Will sniffs the tea. "What is this?"

"Herbal."

He grumbles, "Decaffeinated."

"You're agitated enough," Alana notes. "You ready?"

"For what: a conversation? He's not going to say anything here that you don't already know," Will sips the tea. The heat loosens his muscles and lets him think. "More about my delusions of persecution, how I've vilified him to compensate for my imprisonment..."

"He says he can help you. Let him try."

"Again?" Will laughs. He wants to say more, but the delay is making his anxiety rise. The tea helps him focus. "Just bring him out here."

Alana bites down on her lower lip. She takes her tea in both hands and looks back to the kitchen. Lecter finishes tidying the counter, hanging a soiled dish towel on the rack, and then meets her gaze. He approaches the living room slowly. "Hello, Will," he says politely.

"Dr. Lecter."

"I understand you've had a rather hectic night. My condolences."

“Well, I haven’t been working in a stable environment since my psychiatrist was stabbed,” Will glares meaningfully at Lecter’s hands. “I’m coping. How are you, Dr. Lecter?”

“I’m very well.”

He looks well: sickeningly wall. Dressed in his usual splendour and perfectly coifed, Lecter looks about ready to receive guests for a party than negotiate a peace treaty with Will Graham. “Where would you like to begin?”

Will doesn’t know what topic gives him the great advantage. He can’t fight directly without looking hysterical; he needs to traverse Hannibal’s wild wordplay. “Where would you like to begin, Dr. Lecter?” he asks.

Lecter sees the bait for what it is: not that there was much hope for the element of surprise. “At the beginning then,” he smiles, “with Garrett Jacob Hobbs.”

“We’ve worked through Hobbs.”

“But we have not had a chance to resolve the aftermath of his death, nor the murder of his daughter. Shall we talk about Abigail?”

“About her killer?”

“Of course.”

For a long time, they stare at one another: Hannibal at Will’s eyes, Will at Hannibal’s shoulder. The space between them fills with everything they don’t dare utter, with all their dirty secrets. Alana has to stand away from the maelstrom to keep from being swept away.

The Ripper appears so clearly. Hannibal has the surgical knowledge to peel people apart. He has the macabre fascination necessary to turn people into pin cushions. Will can see him painting a room with blood with the same cool he displays when framing people for murder.

As if sensing Will has other murders on the mind, Hannibal avoids the Ripper. He says, “You believe that I killed Abigail Hobbs. Why would I do that?”

“Not for any reason you’re willing to talk about with an audience,” Will glares towards his entourage. Alana shuffles back towards the wall sheepishly; Jack looks even more disappointed. “I’m sure Jack would love to hear what you and Abigail were up to those nights she escaped from the hospital.”

Hannibal doesn’t say anything. His silence is patronizing, piteous.

Will takes another long sip of the tea. His thoughts settle into manageable trails, but they all lead back to Hannibal’s endless supply of alibis. He has to fight to avoid mentioning anything about the Ripper. “Let’s talk about how,” Will sets the mug on the table and drops

into the chair across from Hannibal. "That was your suggestion when you suspected I killed Abigail."

The move is risky for them both, but Hannibal is all the more intrigued by the topic as a result. His neutral mask belies the feral gleam in his eyes. "I would have to fly to Minnesota," he comes to sit in the chair across from Will. "Rented a vehicle to drive to the Hobbs's house. I suspect I would have wielded the same knife as her father."

"Why would you do that?"

"Because that is what her copycat would have done."

"You're not the copycat, Dr. Lecter," Will says menacingly.

Hannibal smiles. His eyes twinkle. "No, I'm not, but it was the copycat who killed Abigail Hobbs."

Abigail's blood geysers from her open neck and splatters against Will's face, scalding him. He shakes his head to dispel the vision, but the phantom blood still itches on his skin. "How would you have killed her?"

"I had no reason to kill Abigail."

"Neither did I," Will tells the Ripper. There are antlers piercing through the flesh of his forehead and blood pooling in his irises. Will blinks and they disappear, though Hannibal's face remains distorted.

"You were not in control of your actions," the Ripper hisses.

Will already knows the answer, but he poses his next words as a question anyways, "And you are?"

The Ripper's smile is a wicked image, "Always."

Will matches the grin. He doesn't need the Ripper to answer. He knows this monster's methods all too well. He leans toward the dark across from him, "You would have carved her tongue out of her throat and used it as a bookmark. Or painted the walls red with her blood."

Alana's voice strips paint from the walls with its quavering, "Will?"

"Abigail would have been sweeter than that census taker."

The Ripper looks concerned. His red eyes burrow under Will's skin, straight for the younger man's heart, tying knots with his veins as they go. "Those methods sound more like the work of the Chesapeake Ripper than they do of the copycat."

Just like that, the Ripper's facade melts away, as does Will's smile. He is left staring at the interested look on Hannibal's face. Fear seems like a logical reaction, especially with

Jack's stare roving over him, but Will can't find the strength to be agitated. He is calm: eerily calm.

The absence of fear increases his anxiety to the point where he begins to lose control of his emotions. Will's heart rate doubles, his vision blurs, an his whole body breaks out in a fierce sweat. He builds thoughts slowly in straight lines instead of wild circles. The feeling is familiar, *terrifyingly* familiar, but Will can't place it, not until Hannibal begins speaking in tones too low and slow for real time.

Baltimore. The first night his meds changed. Will remembers losing days and nights, remembers his thoughts converging with his cell mate's the same way they just did with the Ripper. He looks at the mug on the table. "You put something in the tea..."

"It's just tea, Will," Alana tells him.

Hannibal's thoughts override her in Will's perception though. He sees the doctor's best plans neatly laid: not enough to incapacitate, merely to loosen Will's tongue. The medication melts his brain into pliant, receptive mush. He's open to meddling in ways he hasn't been since before realizing Hannibal's true nature.

He's able to make eye contact with Hannibal. The doctor's eyes twist in an impressive facsimile of pity. "You are confused, Will."

"Yes," he agrees immediately, "but..."

Hannibal sighs, "I am not the Chesapeake Ripper."

"I didn't..." words burst and splatter against the insides of his skull. "I didn't mean to."

"No," Hannibal agrees, "Your response is understandable, Will, given what you've been through."

The room, once so full of secrets, lies, and unspoken threats clears in a rush. Will feels Hannibal taking aim at his soul and can do nothing to stop the upcoming blow.

"I had a conversation with Dr. Chilton before coming here," Hannibal confesses. His eyes flit to Alana and Jack: this next part is as much for their ears as it is Will's. "I was hoping he would provide me with some insight into treating these delusions. Unfortunately, it seems that Dr. Chilton learned little from his work with Abel Gideon. Your drug regimen at Baltimore, Will, included powerful hypnotics-"

Will struggles against the chemical confines Hannibal has administered, "Stop."

"-which Dr. Chilton claims were used to test the limits of your empathy. To see how psychologically compromised you would have to be in order to adopt the traits of a murderer."

"STOP."

"Is that true, Will?"

Alana's alarm floods the room; Jack's guilt is hot on its heels. Will shakes his head violently, "None of this matters."

"I am sorry, Will," Hannibal's not sorry. "I only mean to assist in your recovery. Your incarceration has clearly affected your cognition."

"My cognition is affected by..." Will's throat closes. He's picking up on everybody else in the room besides himself. Hannibal's curiosity is intoxicating. Will is dizzy with a desire to play, to know, to see. He glares at Alana and Jack, whose anguish and regret are overthrowing his dark sense of delight. "...being left to rot in prison while I'm rearranged by psychiatrists."

"Will," Alana exhales heavily. She is as indignant as she can be. "Will, I am so-"

"Of course you are," Hannibal's words taste like blood on Will's tongue. He laps up the bittersweet satisfaction of seeing his Holy Trinity stunned into silence, "You're always sorry. Which is more than I can say for Jack. What's wrong, Agent Crawford? You have so little to say for someone with so much to answer for."

"That's enough, Will," Hannibal warns him.

"This isn't nearly enough," Will says, snarling. His whole body thrums with energy and hate, heat and panic. The loss of his self is accelerating. Will descends into the Baltimore of his mind and lashes out from behind his cage. "I'm you right now, Doctor. What does it mean if you don't like what you see?"

Hannibal's lips curl ever-so-slightly into the most insidious of grins: part-threat, part-respect, all Lecter. The rails fall away from under Will's train of thought and he enters a free fall. One minute he's slumped in the chair and the next he's lunging across the table, lashing out for any part of the doctor he can tear. Terror, rage, and self-pity colour the room red, but Will's senses are not long for the world. His hands meet flesh just as he bottoms out mentally. His spirit switches places with the floor, and everything goes black.

Happy reading!

Triple Dog Dare

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

Readers, I hope you all had a wonderful December. Happy New Year! Only a few short weeks until the new season. Thank you very much for your kind attention! I'm looking forward to finishing up with a few more installments. I hope you'll stick around.

"I had not thought death had undone so many."

~*The Wasteland* (I 63)

Chapter Twenty-Eight: Triple Dog Dare

Will's out just long enough for the room to enter a barrel roll. He comes to in a hard spin, like he's riding the centre of a wave. Voices orbit him, but they're unintelligible. He doesn't care much for answering, so Will doesn't push himself to regain full consciousness just yet. He lets the torpor carry him far and away before the feeling of cold water on his brow draws him back to the living room.

"Slowly, Will," Alana tells him. His body doesn't give him the choice to disobey. He is so tired. Exhaustion clutches the marrow of his bones and wraps itself tightly around every joint. He has to think long and hard to answer simple questions like where he is and why he's there. Alana grips his shoulder, "Just take it easy."

The answers materialize slowly in his mind, and the words take even longer to leave his mouth. "Where's Dr. Lecter?" Will's eyes close of their own volition afterwards, the energy required to hold them open being expended by those three small words. They spring back when the doctor steps forward.

"I'm here, Will," he's been drawn away from the scene by Jack Crawford. "Are you calm?"

Something about his stance holds Will's attention. The dip in his shoulders, the slight grimace in his face, the wary look in his eyes are all authentic and unfeigned. Since his

attack could not have been coordinated, Will's a little surprised by the expression. "Are you disappointed?" he wonders aloud.

"I am discontent," Hannibal admits: whatever he hoped to achieve with the tea obviously failed. He covers it up by emphasizing Will's damaged psych once more, "You're clearly suffering from severe post traumatic stress."

Will hopes to sense some degree of dishonesty in the doctor's remark and is disappointed when he finds none. Lecter believes his diagnosis is accurate. Given that his panic has overridden a small dose of a hypnotic, at least for a short time, Will's inclined to believe him. "What was in the tea?" he dares to ask.

"Just tea," Alana replies. "I prepared it myself, Will."

"I'll bet you did," he glares at Hannibal as best he can. "Where's the rest of it?"

Hannibal appears just downtrodden enough to make Alana and Jack assume he is, "Mopped up. I'm afraid you knocked it over during your episode."

Will breathes through his hate. "I'm sure," he growls. The room tilts and whirls as he shifts into a sitting position. He catches the damp cloth from his forehead as it falls. Alana tries to stop him, but Will is adamant about addressing Lecter with some degree of verticality. "I think," he drops against the chair, wheezing from the exertion, "we can agree that this meeting is a fruitless activity."

"I disagree," Hannibal's voice is husky with artificial sympathy. "I believe that this meeting is all the more fruitful now that your mistreatment at the hands of Dr. Chilton has been exposed."

"An ironic distinction given all the mistreatment I received at your hands, Doctor."

"My mistreatment was unintentional, and I am deeply apologetic for all the ways I failed you as a physician," Hannibal portrays just enough emotion to confirm his story before continuing. "What Dr. Chilton did to you was intentional, not to mention malicious. How many killers were you, Will? Do you even know?"

Lecter's suggestion is powerful. Will plunges back down the stone staircase in his memory to the dimly lit basement. He bounces from cell to cell, mind to mind, and has to struggle to find his way back to his own head. When he does, Will finds that he's not alone: he's followed his own suggestions all the way to Lecter. "Just one," he utters through gritted teeth, "but he was a real piece of work. Tell me, Doctor: what kind of person murders a sixteen year old girl in the same manner as her serial killer father, and then mounts her on a stag's head?"

"A psychopath," Hannibal answers quickly. "A man who lacks empathy."

"But not sympathy. Whoever killed Abigail Hobbs loved her and killed her and mounted her."

(And Will feels every step in the process with Hannibal's heavy heart.)

"You loved Abigail Hobbs," Lecter points out.

Will's heart aches with his own pain for once, but then he remembers who he is talking to. "So did you," he levels his gaze, "The difference is that I didn't kill her."

"You're making baseless accusations, Will."

"You don't deny having the opportunity to kill Abigail Hobbs."

"But I do lack motive."

"So did I."

"Your actions were not your own," Hannibal observes.

"But yours are."

The doctor's face has the faintest hint of a smile, "Always." He cuts Will off with a new prompt: "What do you remember from Baltimore?"

"Don't-" Will struggles against the flood of memories, "-change the subject."

"I'm not: your suspicions of me solidified in Baltimore. I'm attempting to determine how. Would you prefer speaking with Dr. Bloom?"

"I'd prefer speaking with the real you." The one with red eyes, antlers, and Abigail's blood on his hands.

"You mean the version of me that you have imagined."

He's at the mercy of Hannibal's intense gaze and Chilton's grating voice. "You know damn well that's not what I'm talking about."

"Your mind has been bombarded with psychopathic personalities."

"I knew it was you before Baltimore."

That should be the end of it, but Hannibal is not content to simply shake the foundations of Will's uneasy truce with the rest of the world. He wants Will hopeless; he wants Will broken. The perception that he is broken is just as damaging and potentially more satisfying. "Your brain was on fire before Baltimore, and since then, you have been manipulated into believing you are any number of convicts and killers."

"That doesn't mean I've been manipulated into believing you are other killers."

"You just accused me of being the Chesapeake Ripper."

"You *drugged* me," Will feels cornered by the number of stares he's receiving. He tries to turn the conversation around. "What do you want, Dr. Lecter? What are you hoping to gain from this?"

Lecter makes a show, as he always does, of moving down to Will's eye level. The way he lifts his pants, the way he folds his hands, the way his gaze softens communicates professional calm. He is the picture of good psychiatry. "I want to help you, Will, particularly in light of what Dr. Chilton has told me."

Will fights the urge to laugh. Hannibal has always known what Chilton's been up to, but it hasn't been advantageous to reveal the truth about Baltimore until now. "You couldn't help me before," he notes.

Hannibal micro-winces. "You said you were being me. Show me again: without attacking me this time."

He sees the steps so clearly all of a sudden: Hannibal has already undermined him with Baltimore, so there's nothing to gain by having Will play pretend. Except to further stoke Lecter's ego, and Will is having none of that. The man has had him locked up physically and mentally. He's killed at least five people and seeks to destroy by any means necessary. Will knows he can't win here, but at least he can create a satisfying loss for himself. More than that, he can bait Lecter out of hiding. Hannibal won't resist retribution where his ego is concerned.

"I'm tired of playing you," Will says, catching Lecter momentarily off-guard. Will chooses his next words very carefully, "Sadist. Classist. Narcissist. I stand by my original assessment: I don't find you very interesting. Chilton introduced me to more interesting psychopaths than you, killers who weren't just fuelled by curiosity and the desire to make others miserable. You're nothing more than a spoiled brat, Dr. Lecter."

Hannibal grimaces for Alana and Jack's benefit, but Will sees inside him, and the shadows are mounting. His eyes have taken on a dangerous quality that Will can't place. "You're being rude, Will," Dr. Lecter says coldly.

The word strikes a chord. Memories of consulting with Dr. Lecter in his classroom at Quantico flood Will's mind. Rude was a word reserved in his personal lexicon for Ripper victims. "Don't flatter yourself: you're not the Chesapeake Ripper," Will says, believing it at long last. The real Chesapeake Ripper wouldn't bother playing these kinds of games with him.

A darkness washes over Lecter. He glares daggers into Will, all the more so when he starts to smile. "And you're not a killer," the doctor states flatly.

"Thank you for saying so," Will replies. He can't help but feel relieved that Hannibal has confirmed his innocence for Jack and Alana. The doctor's testimony is still the strongest among those who know him.

"I believe you were right, Will," Hannibal stand, "This does seem like a rather fruitless conversation."

“That’s not your fault, Doctor,” Will glances at Jack.

“I believe it is. My actions or rather inactions as your physician have resulted in a decline in your psychological health. Is there nothing I can say to you to restore your good confidence?”

Will doesn’t answer the question directly. He can see Hannibal’s verbal traps a mile away. Instead, he asks for the one answer that remains unspoken, the one thought that nags on his addled brain as he mounts Abigail on the stag’s head once more time. “Why did you cut the flesh from you back?”

Beneath the vacant expression on Hannibal’s face lurks a pain that only Will is aware of, one that he is not imagining. “I believe this meeting is over,” the doctor says. “I’m sorry, Will. I had hoped I might convince you to abandon these delusions and offer you some respite for what Dr. Chilton has done. Unfortunately, that does not appear to be the case. Good day, Alana. Jack.” His stare bears down hard on the former profiler’s chest, “Will.”

He then stalks slowly, politely from the room.

Jack prods Will’s chest with a glare carrying all his pent-up frustrations with the Ripper and the copycat combined. His silence is louder than his yell. He stalks after Lecter but leaves a trail of storm clouds in his wake.

Will expects Alana to leave too. She looks livid enough. However, he’s quickly roused from another Baltimore flashback by her performing a cursory examination of his head. She prods a bump developing on his scalp from where he connected with the floor. The expression on her face is disquieting and uncomfortable. Alana is more confused than angry all of a sudden, which leaves Will more confused than tired. “What is it?”

“It’s very rare for someone to lose consciousness during a panic attack,” she admits, “even rarer for them to display this kind of exhaustion and disorientation for so long afterwards.”

He lets her suspicions hang in the air between them. “I guess it must not have been a normal panic attack then,” Will offers.

Alana abandons her line of questioning and goes right back to being angry. If Will’s well enough to be suspicious, he’s well enough to answer for the previous meeting. “Hannibal didn’t deserve that. You were being very rude,” she tells him.

“He was rude to me first,” Will’s eyelids slip closed.

If Alana says anything, he doesn’t hear. The floor gives way and Baltimore catches him in a strong embrace.

Will wakes up in bed. He shakes the remaining fog from between his ears and surveys the room. The house is quiet, but he is not alone. Someone's shuffling around the kitchen, releasing the dogs to the dark fields for a run. He feels awful, which results in him feeling better than he has before. Will rises slowly, grabs his coat, and heads for the door.

Alana stops him on the way out: "You're awake."

"I'm taking a walk," he's on the porch.

"I'll come with you."

"I'd rather you didn't."

He steps outside and shuts the door loud enough for her not to follow.

The night is refreshing. Will's mood is playing pinball between sad, angry, and apathetic; the sunset brings his emotions to pause. He takes no comfort in knowing that Hannibal is working tonight, though knowing the doctor has played all his cards brings Will some peace. Jack isn't going to send him back to Baltimore knowing what Chilton did. With any luck, he's going to leave Will alone for the foreseeable future.

(All the better to address Hannibal's continued freedom.)

Will rounds the corner of the house but doesn't linger. He knows Alana's looking for an in and doesn't want to give her one. The dogs aren't far. He follows in their wake towards the trees, letting the long grass and twilight sky soothe his thoughts into coherence. The shadows beckon, but Will wants to remain visible and available. He can't leave Hannibal without a target.

As if in response, the trees shake and shuffle a short distance from where Will is standing. He takes a cautionary step back before instinctively raising his arms. The agent emerges, gun at the ready, and third time is looking to be a charm until Will realizes her stance is all wrong. Her right arm dangles, blood dripping from the fingertips. The gun weaves unsteadily over Will's chest between his shoulders. Her skin is ashen and blue in the moonlight, while her eyes are sinking steadily into her face.

"Agent," Will says. This is the longest she's held a gun on him since they met. His brain takes a long moment to catch up with everything that's happening. The only thing he can think to say is, "You're bleeding."

She's lowered her gun by the time he's finished speaking and folded her injured arm against her chest. "Someone's here," she says, fumbling for her cell phone. Will doesn't notice when she tosses it to him; he's listening for the dogs. They have gone quiet. He hopes it's just the hammering of his heart making them impossible to hear.

"Call Jack," the agent commands him, breaking Will from his trance. He finds her phone at his feet. "Call Jack and get back to the house. Now. Go."

Will listens carefully. Past the pounding in his chest and the agent's ragged breathing, he thinks he can hear one of the dogs growling.

"Go," the agent tells him again.

"Shut up," he commands her. The growling fades beneath the wind. "Just. Shut. Up."

She obeys at last, though it hardly matters. There's not a sound in the world that can drown out the tortured sounds of a dog being torn apart.

...'happy' reading...?

Slash and Burn

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

I blocked off last Saturday to write. Friday night, my computer crashed and burned. I spent Saturday shopping for a new one, Sunday back at work, and then this week with my fingers crossed hoping my new PC would arrive.

My fiance insisted I use his computer today to write fanfiction. Those were actually his exact words. I've been on here non-stop since last night. And that is how I know our love is real.

Readers, I very much appreciate your patience. This chapter covers a lot of ground, because I am looking forward to the happy finish. I'm thinking there's two more chapters to go, possibly an epilogue. Thank you so much for your kind readership! Less than two months until the premiere!

"(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all

Enacted on this same divan or bed;

I who have sat by Thebes below the wall

And walked among the lowest of the dead.)

Bestows one final patronizing kiss,

And gropes his way, finds the stairs unlit…"

~*The Wasteland* (III 243-248)

Chapter Twenty-Nine: Slash and Burn

Anger is a pathetically small word. Hate: doubly so. Will is an inferno. He is every circle of hell, including the ones Hannibal helped invent. Grief and fury spill out of him in

equal measure. The fact that his rage is the doctor's design fails to deter him from sinking straight into the darkest recesses of his imagination. Hell is a welcome companion, the only friend Will has left. Until he finds Hannibal, of course, and then Will intends to show the good doctor exactly what hell looks like.

The evening unravels, and Will follows the thread back, past the mess of fur and blood, through the trees. He stalks the narrow pathway of the agent's spine, rising like a shiver into the crown of her head. She hears him – impressive – but doesn't turn before he snakes an arm around her chest. Will then captures her cry with the palm of one hand and drives a knife into the soft flesh of her bicep with the other.

Her training takes over, but Will must know exactly where to stand because she doesn't reach him. He responds by jerking the blade deeper, savouring every scream he pulls from her unwilling throat. The sound of her cries struggle to escape her covered mouth and end up reverberating along Will's arm in a happy tingle. His blade taps against bone, unleashing a satisfying crescendo before the agent sags against him. The only sign she's still alive is the way her muscles twitch as Will continues to saw her arm.

(He smells her, because Hannibal would smell her. She is damp earth, rain, fear, and *hate*. Or maybe that's just Will.)

Logic asserts itself quietly into the scene. Will can't cut her arm off (though not for lack of trying), and he doesn't want to think about the bloodshed that comes next, so he abandons the fantasy. Light and sound greet him in a rush. Crime scenes at night are a disorienting juxtaposition swirl of red and white beams from the cruisers and ambulance. A small army of agents are combing their way through the trees, but the one he wants to speak to is slumped in the back of the ambulance. She's less angry than Will is but not by much.

"Why did he stop?" he asks.

The agent can't respond immediately. She's too busy screaming from the paramedic inflating a tourniquet around her mangled arm. "I cut him!" she almost pukes and has to tug her hair to pull herself together. "I cut him…he took my knife."

"Do you have to do this now?" the paramedic asks angrily.

Will's brain has trouble integrating the information with his vision, so he asks for clarification, "You cut him or you stabbed him?"

The agent struggles to breathe. She swipes her tears away, trying to embody an FBI agent even if she doesn't feel like one. "I stabbed him. He got away."

"He wasn't expecting you to stab him," Will mutters, fantasy unfolding. No wonder the agent escaped with her arm. "He wasn't expecting the dogs, but he really wasn't expecting you to stab him."

"Why the hell not?" the agent hisses.

"Because of who he wanted you to think he was. Jack didn't give you permission to use brutal force on me."

As if he is a child: "I knew it wasn't you."

"How?" Jack sends shockwaves through the paramedic. The agent straightens. Only Will is immune. Fury inoculates him against Crawford's presence. He's finally able to stand his ground against the older man's stormy disposition. Jack doesn't notice: he's making a point of not looking at Will. "How do you know it wasn't him?"

The agent knows her cue. She sounds like herself even as her skin continues to gray, "Too short. Too slight. No stabbed."

Jack's still looking at Will. "You're sure you stabbed him."

"I'm sure."

"You thought Hannibal Lecter was the Ripper this afternoon," Jack says to Will in the closest approximation of gently that his voice can achieve. He doesn't know what tragedy deserves his focus. The nearest and dearest is the reminder of Miriam Lass slumped less than five feet from him. "Zeller just pulled your fillet knife from one of the dogs."

"It'll have my prints on it," Will replies. He lets his imagination go and clings to the present, to the wall he's built between himself and the world. Fury numbs him, protects him, from the carnage burned into his brain. "Where are the dogs, the…the *living* dogs?"

"With Alana in the house. Animal control is taking the other two," Jack remembers how to be a human. "I'm sorry."

Will has just enough hate left in him to hate having to say this: "I didn't do it." His face twists in anticipation of tears, but he can't cry. Sadness just feeds the fire inside him.

Jack apologizes, "I know." He just needed to be sure. The wound on his agent cuts too close to home.

The paramedic finishes with the agent's arm. "She needs to get to a hospital."

"I'll go with her."

The words are out of Will's mouth before he has a plan. Anger does wonders for the imagination though: fever quickens his visions but fury strengthens all the supports. At long last, Will sees the ending, sees his escape.

Jack almost starts to yell: almost. He stops himself in the nick of time, the blood on Will's hands reminding him of all the blood on his own. "You're not leaving my sight," Jack says as sternly as he can without hurting Will further. "I'm arranging for you-"

Will doesn't give him the chance to finish. He trumps whatever Jack might say with, "Lampman's at the hospital."

Game. Set. Match. Mentions of Lampman shatter whatever remains of Jack's reserves. He can't say no without hurting Will, and Jack knows he's already done enough damage. "You'll have an agent on you the entire time."

Using her feels cheap, but Will watches his conscience burn. His solid constitution, once iron, blazes like tissue paper. Lying is too easy. Looking broken feels natural. "I'm not going anywhere."

Jack doesn't question the performance for a second; he's feeling pretty broken tonight too. "You don't mind an extra couple minutes on the trip?"

The agent still manages a shrug, "Long as I get to keep my arm, sir."

The older agent tilts his head towards the cab, "Get in."

Will measures his new escort's capabilities with the fringes of his vision. Like Pollard, the agent is clean cut, by-the-book, and eager to please. He doesn't know how to pick pockets or trail targets in silence. Will can lose him easily in the hospital. Might even be able to disarm him, too. Guns make acquiring a vehicle much easier.

He's too busy plotting his escape to notice that Agent Quick-Draw's got her eyes on him. Her attempts to look imposing are greatly hindered by the straps holding her to the gurney. "Whatever you're thinking, don't," she tells him.

Will doesn't balk at her menace; he steals her violence away, infusing every syllable with threat. Mostly for Hannibal, but he doesn't mind letting the agents know what they have to look forward to if they try to stop him. "I'm not thinking anything."

"Crawford's going to have that place on lockdown."

"You're right," he doesn't have the patience for banter and goes straight for the kill. "Way easier to escape from an ambulance." (That would solve his transportation problem.) "And I'm not even handcuffed this time."

His escort stiffens; the paramedic shudders. Will fires a glare at the injured agent's shoulder and promptly retreats inside himself. Jack won't make his escape so easy this time. There's probably a bureau vehicle trailing them just waiting for him to snap.

The agent on the gurney says something. Will wouldn't have noticed, but her tone has softened. She's given up on banter too. "About your dogs," she adds, the words finally reaching Will's overheated brain. "I'm sorry."

He doesn't want to think about the dogs. They were barely dogs by the time he reached them; Hannibal saw to that. There are forts inside him, vacant and cold, that the fire doesn't reach, places where the dogs reside with all their innate goodness. Places Will

doesn't want to remember because they'll stay his hand. He cannot be a good person and enact bloody vengeance. Hannibal has to know pain before the night is through.

Will rebukes her, "They weren't a part of your purview, agent."

"You are," she stares at the roof of the ambulance now. "And they were yours, so…"

The silence of the ambulance quells the inferno. What started as an attempt to disarm him has become a genuine apology. The agent really wishes she could have saved the dogs, and she hates herself for not doing so in the forest.

Will doesn't even try to blame her. He doesn't want her remorse. Her hostility is much more useful. Not to mention: "Where did you say you stabbed him?"

She's circling the drain in terms of consciousness, but the agent's instincts are still intact. "I didn't," she abandons her guilt. "Not to you."

"Afraid I'll finish the job?"

"Certain of it. Just not on the right person."

"Better give me a clue," Will casts a meaningful glance in his escort's direction, "or I'll have to assume it's anyone."

She calls his bluff, saying nothing, resuming her hard stare of the ceiling. Nevertheless, Will still feels watched.

The escort shifts uncomfortably in his seat. "He's still got his eyes on me, Stewart."

The agent, Stewart, grants herself one bitter smirk before feeling guilty again. She lets her eyes close, "No, he doesn't."

She's right: Will only has eyes for the blank antlered man in his mind's eye. He doesn't need to know where she cut him. Knowing that Hannibal is bleeding is enough. For now.

It's just as well that Will didn't take the ambulance by force. Once the flood of hospital personnel whisk Stewart away, Will emerges from the cab to discover a black SUV parked nearby. Two more agents trail from a respectable distance as Will and his frazzled escort make their way to the elevator.

Once disembarked, Will oscillates between leading and following, testing the advantages of both positions. The agent has some idea of where they're going but not enough to claim the lead. As a result, Will is allowed to play on the fringes of the agent's vision. He bides his time, feigning innocence, until a crowd of staff, patients, and visitors provides cover. Will drifts easily into the flow of traffic, turns, and very calmly begins walking in the opposite direction.

(The agent's gun isn't worth the risk of getting caught. Besides, there are plenty of weapons at Hannibal's house.)

Will ducks into a room as his additional handlers pass by, oblivious to his disappearance. He is quick to round the corner at the end of the hall as controlled panic erupts from behind. Footsteps charge in his wake. Will avoids the stairs and ducks into the entrance of another wing. The heavy, windowless doors shield him from one's of the agent's sight as they head for the stairs. He waits for them to emerge, barking orders into a cell phone, before risking the stairs once more.

He almost takes a patient with him into the landing from how carelessly he's moving. Will has to catch both her and her IV stand to keep them from falling. He takes his leave the second she's more or less upright, but before the door can swing shut, realizes his error and has to turn around.

Lampman braces herself against the door. "Will," she says politely. "What a pleasant surprise."

The agents converge on his position. Lampman looks to him, nonplussed, and smiles softly. "Were you looking for me?"

Will recognizes a way out when he sees one. "You weren't in your room," he watches as the agents begin to stand down.

"I was taking a walk. My physiotherapist insists on it. I'm supposed to make one more lap, but I would appreciate an excuse to return to the room early," Lampman tilts her head imperceptibly towards the hall…and the agents behind her. "Would you mind escorting me?"

Again, Will can't refuse her offer. He nods in acquiescence and retreats from the stairwell. Lampman takes him by the arm in what he first assumes is an extension of her ruse. Now that he's not running, Will sees the toll her wounds have taken on her. She really does need the support.

The agents hover. They are all the more attentive after having been outsmarted once. One by one, Will's opportunities to get out flicker and die. Lampman's room is still under guard. Soon, he'll have five trained agents watching his every move, reporting his actions back to Jack.

(He really ought to have stolen the ambulance.)

"You weren't surprised to see me," Will comments once the door is safely closed behind them.

Lampman releases his arm from her grasp. Her strength seems to be returning now that she's back in her room. "Agent Crawford called," Lampman admits. "He was

concerned you were going to escape."

"Are you concerned about me escaping?"
"I'm concerned about you."

"I'm fine," Will curses. He tries to say more, but the words turn to ash in his mouth. He finds himself telling the truth, as he is so wont to do in her presence. "Actually, I'm not fine. I'm…I'm…"

Talking about the hatred will purge it, and Will doesn't want to lose the edge he's developing. The fire feels right. After all this time, after all that's gone wrong, he deserves to hate Hannibal. He's earned the right to hate Hannibal to death. "Jack told you," he heaves. "You already know why I'm here."

Lampman doesn't prompt him along. She takes the time to find a comfortable position on the bed and then levels a stare at Will that could cut glass. When Will still hasn't started speaking, Lampman dares to draw him out. "Where are you going?" she asks him.

"You already know where I'm going."

Her lips fold into a straight line. No more games then. "I'm very sorry about your dogs, Will."

Hatred tears so easily. Will tries to hold onto it, but the tighter his grasp, the more brittle his emotions become. One minute he is a raging inferno; the next, he is stormy seas. His hearts sinks through dark water into oblivion. Of course, the dogs are dead. Hannibal butchered them. He decorated the forest with their entrails. Partly to make Jack think Will had lost his mind, partly because the stubborn agent refused to lose her arm, and partly because Hannibal Lecter is evil, pure and simple.

"When I was first committed, I didn't believe they'd actually leave me there," Will confesses. "Not at Baltimore. Not with Chilton. I didn't believe that I would be convicted. I was so sure they would find the evidence to get me out. I didn't even care if the evidence was against him. I just needed to be believed again.

"Now, they have Abigail Hobbs. Another FBI agent almost died tonight. Two of my dogs were torn to pieces. And the only reason Hannibal Lecter would get contacted is as a sympathetic ear to his former protégé or his best friend for life, Jack Crawford."

Will heaves a shuddering breath. He forces himself to keep going. "They're never going to let me out of Baltimore."

Lampman doesn't have to say a word. She can't be honest and comforting at the same time in this case. "What evidence would you need against Hannibal Lecter?" she asks.

He laughs and weeps at the same time. "Something impossible."

"Like the fact that he is the Chesapeake Ripper?"

“Hannibal Lecter isn’t the Chesapeake Ripper. He is curious about the Ripper,” Will sighs. “He’s curious about everything.”

“He kills out of curiosity. Does he take souvenirs for the same reason?”

“No, no, he takes souvenirs to mask the intention of his crimes. Cassie Boyle’s lungs made Jack think he was the Minnesota Shrike. The flesh from Abigail Hobbs’s back made Jack think he was the copycat.”

Lampman’s face curls in mild disgust. “The oysters…”

Will’s imagination flares to life. “What did you say?”

“The lower back, just above the thighs, is the tenderest cut from fowl. They’re called the oysters. You were talking about the Ripper and I…”

Will doesn’t hear the rest of what she has to say. He’s too busy vomiting.

Decline and Fall

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

It's finally time...

I have one final chapter planned for this fic, though I am thinking an epilogue might be in order. This chapter took quite a bit of time to put to paper, so I do hope you enjoy it.

The support has been overwhelming on the part of the readers. I owe you all a deep debt of gratitude. Thank you very much for coming this far! I do hope you'll stick around to see what's next.

"These fragments I have shored against my ruins."

~*The Wasteland* (V 430)

Chapter Thirty: Decline and Fall

His stomach knows before his head that what Lampman has suggested is true. Phantom meat sits like rocks in Will's intestines. He hacks, retches, but there's nothing in his stomach except the ghosts of Ripper victims. Will ends up dry heaving.

When his brain finally catches up, Will sees all the links he missed before: the protein scramble and Cassie Boyle's missing lung, the damn dinner party when an organ thief was on the loose, the missing pieces of Abigail Hobbs. Hannibal fits so neatly into the role of the Ripper that the conclusion seems like coincidence. Will doubts himself, but then he remembers that the news of Miriam Lass's arm was suppressed. The only person who would know to replicate that wound, aside for the responding officers, is the Ripper himself.

Will cups a hand over his mouth, swallowing the lump of spectral meat in his throat. "He was right under our noses – under Jack's nose – this entire time."

Lampman raises a brow, "He is the Ripper?"

“Dr. Lecter is an intelligent psychopath. A sophisticated sadist,” Will laughs bitterly, fighting his gag reflex. “He’s spent years cultivating a carefully crafted persona as a respected physician and psychiatrist, all to hide his heinous crimes. He was helping me. I… I…I told him everything.”

And Hannibal had, in turn, told him everything: through thinly veiled truths, through misdirection. He spoke in fluent double speak. Will replays their conversations and is finally able to see the source. Hannibal kept the Ripper under his skin but never out of his thoughts. In fact, he was only too happy to give Will glimpses of the monster he kept so perfectly concealed, culminating in their last exchange in Minnesota.

Will’s sadness suddenly turns to rage. “He’s right there! He’s been right there the whole time!” he throws the first thing in reach, one of the hospital issue chairs in the corner of the room. “Kills untold numbers of people, kills a trainee, and then who should appear two years later but her mentor, Jack Crawford, looking for help with an abnormal brain. Has me locked up for five counts of murder. Can’t think, can’t breathe, can’t get Chilton out of my head...”

“You made it out of Baltimore, Will.”

He stares at her shell-shocked, stunned, only in part because he knows she’s wrong. Will is bowled over by how she doesn’t recognize the fallacy she’s purporting. “There is no outside of Baltimore,” he breathes, “not when Hannibal Lecter is still out there *ripping*.”

The mangled corpses of his dogs greet Will in his mind’s eye. He can’t contain himself. “I have to go,” is all he can say. “I have to go now.”

“Will, stop,” Lampman knows. She’s always known. Since their first session at Bethesda, from the first moment she laid eyes on him, Frances Lampman has known exactly where Will’s release has been leading. She still doesn’t want to believe it. “You should call Jack Crawford.”

“Jack Crawford isn’t going to believe me. He isn’t going to believe you or anyone else who tries to raise the alarm about Hannibal Lecter,” Will glances through the cracks in the shades to survey the hallway. His escort is waiting, though the other two agents have mercifully disappeared.

He turns back to Lampman. She is still water. Will catches his reflection in her countenance and shudders. He’s wilder now than he was before Hannibal broke him. “What are you hoping to gain?” she asks him.

“I thought it was justice,” Will muses, “but I don’t believe in justice anymore. Maybe I never did…I want my freedom.”

“How are you going to get that?”

She already knows. The faint tremors in his voice aren’t from pain, at least not from her physical injuries. Lampman wants to hear Will say it, to have the sheer horror of his endgame resonate from every corner of the room. She wants to save him, and even more

unbelievably, still believes that there are parts of him worth saving. That Will Graham isn't rotting in some basement cell in Baltimore. He's here, in the room, even as the monster wearing his skin demands vengeance and blood.

(She's right, just not in any way that matters.)

But Will wants so badly to be a different man, a worse man, and he has Hannibal to thank for that. He doesn't have the heart to confront himself, nor does he feel like confronting her. Instead, Will apologizes and means it.

Lampman sets her lips in a hard line. Her chin quivers infinitesimally. She apologizes and means it too.

He doesn't want to stay. The silence of the room has a terrifying quality, filled as it is with all the things Will lets go unsaid. Lampman takes the liberty of breaking the quiet with something she doesn't need to say out loud. "I…" she has a hard time, even at the end of all things, telling him what to do. "I can't let you do this."

Will has no heart left to break, but his next words still hurt: "I can't let you stop me."

Lampman's resolve returns. "You are better than this," she says.

(There are still parts of Will Graham worth saving, but they're parts only Lampman can see.)

"No," Will says, "I'm not."

His brain takes a backseat to his emotions. Just as well, since Lampman's hand shifts off her lap to the call button on the bedside rail. Will is already approaching. He snatches up the control for her morphine pump from where she draped it on her walk down the hall.

"Don't," Lampman commands.

"I'm sorry," Will says, meaning it even more than he did before.

She punches the call button and lunges for him. Will slams his thumb on the plunger as many times as he can. She manages to capture his arm in her hands before succumbing. The strength drains from her limbs; Will catches her as she falls.

"I'm sorry," he begs her. "I'm so sorry."

Lampman's unerring stability retreats. Her eyes carry the last vestiges of might, but soon they too become vacant. She slumps in Will's hands, an empty shell, and the room feels colder in her absence. He gently lays her back on the pillows and sets the pump control in the palm of her limp hand.

The nurse charges into the room, followed closely by Will's escort. He doesn't bother lying to them, just clears a space for the interrogatory nurse and retreats. The escort follows him at a respectable distance. Will is barely cognisant of the other man's presence. Instinct

powers him down the hall, dumb luck has a janitor leave a supply room just as he's about to walk past, and Will enters like he belongs there. The agent should know better than to enter, but he's a good lad. He follows Jack's orders straight into Will's trap and ends up unconscious, handcuffed to a rack of cleaning supplies, gun, phone, and car keys confiscated. Will just hopes the keys are for the vehicle out front; carjacking is such an inconvenience.

Hannibal's thoughts are easy to determine now that his profile is fully realized. He's been hiding in plain sight for years, so after getting stabbed in Wolf Trap, the good doctor returns home to nurse his wounds. He has probably already been alerted by Jack but Will's betting that Hannibal isn't expecting a visit, or if he is, that the doctor's not prepared for one. The agent had to have done quite the number on him to abandon a plan to murder her.

Will doesn't care: he'll kill Hannibal whatever way he can. Jack can do what he does best and clean up the crime scene when it's all over.

Emergency provides the best exit: still crawling with people, none of whom are federal agents, and closest to the vehicle. Will rushes down the stairs, inspecting the faces of people he passes by in case they're Jack's. The agents seem to have cleared the area though. Will meets no one and doesn't stop until he reaches the ground floor, whereupon he immediately slows, almost stops.

His skin crawls. Cold sweat beads on the back of his neck. Stewart doesn't have x-ray vision, but he knows she's watching him through the crowd. Worse, he's pretty confident she was on her phone. Will has precious little time to come up with an acceptable plan of attack. He fingers the gun in his pocket and continues towards the exit.

There are three pillars at the edge of the parking lot supporting a canopy over the loading bay and an ambulance blocking the entrance. Will takes his place behind the pillar on the left. Her right arm's in a sling, and Hannibal's proven that she's not even half as adapt when attack from behind as she is from the front.

"I'll call you back," Stewart tells the person on the other line. She passes through the middle of the pillars, exactly as Will predicted, but makes the mistake of looking right instead of left. He grabs her by the forearm, swings her first-first against the pillar, pinning her down.

The cacophony created by paramedics leaving the ambulance drowns out the sound of the agent's small, tortured shout. Her injured arm is drawn tight enough across her chest to pop a few stitches. Will jabs the barrel of his gun against her lower back just in time for silence to settle over the ambulance bay. Stewart obliges the unspoken command by swallowing her next shout.

"That was Crawford," she says. Pain and terror have constricted her vocal chords into a guttural whisper. Her left hand flaps uselessly against her back, emphasizing the phone she still clutches in her fingers. "He knows I'm tailing you."

"Let him know you haven't seen me," Will replies.

Stewart chokes through her next several breaths. She looks over her shoulder towards Will. "Tell him what: you ditched your escort? You're tearing my stitches out in the hospital parking lot? I'm sure Crawford would love-"

Will digs under her coat and yanks out Stewart's weapon. "I have two guns against your back now, Agent."

"Let me turn around," she stammers.

"You're going to call Jack-"

"Let me turn around."

"Tell him you made a mistake."

Stewart kicks him in the kneecap. Will throws her around so her left hand's clamped between her back and the pillar. He drops her gun into his pocket and drives the other into her waist. She drinks in air like a dying woman. "Crawford'll be able to hear that shot all the way in Wolf Trap," she chides him.

Will growls at her. He's already assaulted one federal agent tonight, "Doesn't mean I won't take it."

She rolls her eyes. "You're not going to shoot me."

"Try. Me."

"Crawford's having you recommitted."

Will can't stop his hand from shaking. He inches closer to her, digging the gun deeper into her waist, "You're lying."

Stewart hangs against the pillar, pained and exhausted: "Try me."

The shake moves up his arm and into his torso. Desperation drains from every pore on his body. "I didn't kill my dogs," Will splutters. "I wasn't the one who attacked you."

"Jack thinks the dogs' death pushed you over the edge. Shooting me won't hurt his case. Probably bump you back up to maximum security."

Now Will can't breathe. "He wouldn't."

Stewart stares him down, "Shoot me. Find out."

He lowers the gun from her waist. Stewart pries herself far enough off the wall that she can lower her left arm. Will sets his hand over the wound on her upper arm as a control measure. "Call Jack. Tell him I'm with you. *At* the hospital."

She hangs her head in what Will assumes is frustration, but then the guilt and shame in her expression prickle his senses. Stewart can lie, cheat, and steal, but somehow doing any of the above to Will tests the foundations of her morality. "You've got no leverage," she admits, "I'm going to tell Jack whatever I want."

"No, you won't," though he has no idea why at first. Again, his imagination is working faster than his brain. The answer materializes slowly from the look on her face. Stewart told him before that she wasn't afraid of dying. She's scared of what happens to Will. He poses their conundrum in terms she can understand, "If you tell Jack I've left the hospital, he's going to warn the person I'm going to see. That would be bad for me."

"I'm not going to let you kill Hannibal Lecter," she snaps.

Will keeps prodding. "I just want to be sure that it's him," he says tiredly. "If I'm not, you can take me into custody."

Stewart finally wraps her head around his new plan and makes a face. The logic is there, but it's nigh impossible to see through the insanity of it all. Will doesn't give her a chance to contemplate it further. "Technically you won't be lying to Jack this way."

Lying to Jack is the least of her concerns. Stewart barely gives that a second thought. She's stuck between a rock and a hard place. The phone rises to her eye, but she still hasn't made up her mind yet. Will takes a cautionary step away from her just in case he needs to run.

He dares to meet her gaze. For once, Will's not the first to look away. "I've got him. We're still at the hospital," Stewart tells the pavement. A few yes-sirs later and she disconnects. Will takes the phone from her hand. He releases her from the pillar and inches away, not daring to turn his back on her until she's fallen into step at his side.

The keys he lifted from his escort are for the SUV parked outside the hospital. Will opens the passenger door for Stewart. She takes a moment to glare at him, thinking this is some weird form of chivalry, but Will disabuses her of that notion. "You have your handcuffs, Agent?"

Stewart's fear is so plainly etched on her face that Will almost feels guilty. Almost. She pulls them from the loop on her belt buckle and holds them up for Will to see.

He snatches them from her fingers, clamping the first cuff onto her left wrist. With the chain draped through the arm rest on the passenger door, Will finally steps back a safe distance from her legs. Stewart's eyes water from rage, the betrayal working her over more than the indignity of being handcuffed. "You might be more comfortable without the sling," Will says.

Stewart growls and marches forward. Will raises the gun again. He never has a chance to fire though. Stewart cuffs her other wrist to the door handle and stomps inside the vehicle.

The silence of the cab is grating when he enters on the driver's side. Will casts a sideways glance at Stewart, uncomfortably bound against the door of the car. He puts her cell phone between them as a peace offering, along with her gun. "I am going to let you call Jack," he says.

"Just drive!" Stewart curses.

Will nods. He really should have stolen that ambulance.

Happy reading!

Into Darkness

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

It…is…finished…ish.

One more installment to go!

Readers! Readers! You are all my favourite people. I have so greatly appreciated your kind support during this time. I could not – and I mean this – I could not have finished this without you. Thank you for reading, for following, for everything. I am much, much obliged.

"DA

Dayadhvam: I have heard the key

Turn in the door once and turn once only

We think of the key, each in his prison

Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison

Only at nightfall, aetherial rumours

Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus"

~*The Wasteland* (V 410-416)

Chapter Thirty-One: Into Darkness

Hannibal leaves his French doors unlocked and the lights out. Really, Will has been sufficiently warned. The doctor is in, and he would kill for an uninvited guest.

The plan is simple and insane, but Will chooses to focus on its simplicity. He is going to engage Hannibal Lecter with extreme prejudice; he is going to elicit a confession, or he is going to kill Lecter in the trying. If Jack intends on having him recommitted, and there's no way he won't be when all's said and done, Will figures he should at least have committed a crime. Stewart is his insurance policy: Will left the keys to her handcuffs on the dashboard. Eventually, she is going to get free, call Jack, and charge the front door. He just hopes to be finished with Hannibal before she starts shooting.

(He gives her five minutes. That's probably too many.)

Lecter's dining room is colder than Will remembers. Without the candlelight, without the company, the room has all the personality of a morgue. Will gags when he realizes how apt the comparison is. Hannibal's dining room is a mortuary; the meals are carefully dissected specimens from all those flies he swatted. His culinary creations are avant garde interpretations of a post-mortem.

There's a small collection of medical supplies that do nothing to staunch the disturbing connections between Hannibal's kitchen and murder. A hunting knife sits between a suture needle and some gauze. Blood gleams black under the moonlight, fresh on the towel and the instruments lying atop it. Hannibal can't be far. Will picks up the knife as he passes by: better he has it than Hannibal.

He opts to clear the kitchen first: the room with the most weapons. Hannibal's favourite space. Will checks under the table no matter how unlikely it is as a hiding spot as he moves, inspecting the doorways on either side of the room before slipping into the kitchen.

Will can't see a thing. The only window has been shuttered, leaving only a thin slip of light to stream in from the dining room. He pulls the cell phone from his pocket to use as a crude light source. The kitchen is in the politest state of disarray Will has ever seen. The island has been removed, and stacks of tiles dot the floor in neat columns. Hannibal is having the room renovated. Hardly an undertaking the doctor would take given his predilections for murder, but it is the best way to dispose of any trace evidence left behind from his dinner parties. No wonder Jack never found anything. There were no surfaces for him to investigate in Hannibal's home.

There's nowhere for the doctor to hide either, so Will turns back.

A silhouette greets him in the dining room.

His nightmares collide with reality, giving the illusion of there being a rack of iron bars between him and Hannibal again. The good doctor doesn't help Will's perception by greeting him.

"Hello, Will."

The dank and dark of Baltimore returns, but this time his rage overpowers his fear. Will conjures his memory of the dogs, of Abigail, of the spectral stag he's been haunted by since the sight of Cassie Boyle's impaled body. "Hello, Doctor Lecter," he snarls.

"My sincere condolences for the death of your dogs."

Will raises the gun. "You butchered them."

"Out of necessity," Hannibal's regret is unforced. He so hates when things don't go according to plan. "My apologies. I so rarely lose my temper, but your behaviour today tested my patience."

"Not to mention that agent. Stubbornly refusing to die," Will fights to keep his breathing under control. Klaxons are blaring inside his mind demanding that he *fire, fire, fire*. Hannibal is a safe distance away, visibly unarmed. This could all be over in a matter of moments. Nevertheless, it's not an ending that liberates him. Without proof, Will just kills Hannibal in cold blood, and Jack locks him away in another basement. He still has to be strategic about this. "Then again, she wasn't the first FBI agent to survive you. How long did you let Miriam Lass live before you killed her?"

"You still believe I am the Chesapeake Ripper," Hannibal doesn't even bother to pose the statement as a question.

"I *know* you're the Chesapeake Ripper. I know you, Dr. Lecter. I'm here to make sure everyone else does too."

Hannibal sighs. Things are still not going according to plan. "You want a confession? Some irrefutable evidence?"

Will's being mocked. His whole body burns with fury. "I want you to show me where you do it. Show me where you chop them up."

"How do you know I'll take you there?"

His imagination has been working faster than his mouth again. Will struggles to catch up. Hannibal can't be trusted, but he won't have any ability to refuse Will's request. Why? "Because this is where you prepare the meat. Humans don't last long before they spoil. You would need somewhere close to take them. You have a shed or a garage or a basement where you can bring the bodies. I want to know where it is. And then we're going to call Jack. And then I'm going to kill you."

He thinks his mouth is working faster than his imagination, but that last part is a promise, not a threat.

"You threatened to kill me once before," Hannibal notes. "In Minnesota. Do you remember?"

"Yes, and I asked if you were a murderer," Will teases his finger lightly on the trigger. "I don't need to ask now."

Hannibal considers this. He turns slightly towards the table – checking for the knife, no doubt. "Will my death satisfy you?"

“Not as much as your life dissatisfies me,” he can’t help but smile crookedly, angrily, through the tears that are collecting in his eyes. If he could have dreamt in Baltimore, Will would have dreamed of this moment. There are no bars protecting Hannibal here. “This is your design, doctor.”

“How generous of you,” Hannibal’s smile twists Will’s gut into a butterfly knot, “to believe that I have a design. My actions with you were experimental at best.”

“Would you consider this experiment a success?”

“Success in experimentation has a narrow margin: it relies on achieving a desired result. I had no end in mind for you, Will. An imagination such as yours defies a narrow viewpoint. I kept an open mind. Thus far, you have not disappointed.”

“And if I kill you?”

“I’ll be dead, and you’ll never be able to prove your innocence. Jack Crawford will surely have you locked up again after tonight.”

“You’re not the first person to make that threat.”

“How would you feel about going back to Baltimore?”

“Jack’s not going to send me back to Baltimore. You saw to that this afternoon when you told him about what Chilton did.”

“Chilton’s replacement would be easy to secure. His injuries are so prone to infection, to relapse. I know many psychiatrists who would gladly take his place, myself included,” Hannibal’s shadow grows slightly larger. Will struggles to stand his ground. He can’t stop his heart from trying to leap out of his throat or catch his breath. “You are unstable, Will. If it looks bad, it is bad for the FBI. Jack Crawford would only be too happy to lock you up and throw away the key, especially if it meant reconciling your crusade against me.”

“He wouldn’t do it,” but voice is no match for Hannibal’s, not with Stewart’s own admission that Jack intends to have him recommitted. “I’m not going to be locked up with you. Not again.”

“What makes you think you ever escaped? You’re more entrapped here than you were before,” Hannibal’s shadow swells further. He seems to occupy the whole room. He bleeds into thin tendrils that rope towards the ceiling, that stretch from wall to wall. Will’s chest constricts, pinned as it is between his raging heart and the bars of his cage. “You were locked up long since Baltimore, Will, and you’ll be locked up long after tonight, no matter how this ends.”

He fires. The shadow disperses. In the flash of the bullet, Will can see Hannibal’s face. The good doctor is still standing by the table, silent and still, face a mask of patient contemplation. He springs to life just as the dark returns. Blood explodes from his ear, and Lecter jackknifes with a small grunt of frustration more than pain. Will steadies himself as the aftershocks jangle through him. The gun bounces around Lecter’s chest as the nerves in

his damaged shoulder blade misfire and ricochet through his back. "Start walking, Doctor," he snaps, "or I'll find other places to shoot you."

Lecter rises, still clutching his ear, and nods. Will's too busy watching the doctor's hands and feet to notice. The fight with Tobias Budge suggests that Hannibal can hold his own. His lifetime of killing is a testament to the skills he's hiding beneath an exceptionally coiffed exterior. There doesn't seem to be a side to him that isn't dangerous. Will gives him plenty of time to turn and walk before daring to follow.

Just as it was on the walk to the ECT machine, to every wretched session with Chilton, Will's knowledge is his only companion. He knows Lecter has no intention of leading him into hell without keeping him there. He knows that there is no shred of evidence Lecter is willing to sacrifice in exchange for the chance at survival. They come to this as mirror images bearing weapons and the heavy ache for blood.

He is at the head of the table when Lecter snaps out of his death march. The doctor whips around and throws a chair to the floor in front of Will's feet. It's enough to trip Will up, to throw his already weakened aim off balance, and Hannibal takes advantage of the opportunity. He tears the weapon from Will's fingers and throws it on the floor. Will kicks Hannibal in the left thigh, knocking him back several paces. He lunges for the gun, but he gets caught in the stomach by Hannibal. The doctor throws himself straight into Will's trunk. His inertia sends the two men sliding down the surface of the tabletop in a grapple.

The melee is at once desperate and heartbreaking, ecstatic and wild. Hannibal is broad, powerful strokes; his violence is clinical and anatomically informed. He strangles Will with one hand and assaults his solar plexus with the other. Neither is enough to stop Will, whose movements are quick, rough, and reactive. He attacks in fits and spurts, never where Hannibal expects. Eventually, his hand finds a tender, bandaged area just below the doctor's left hip that blooms wet when firmly grabbed. Will drives his hand against it until he feels the stitches underneath burst.

Hannibal's hand loosens on his neck at long last. Will gasps for breath and presses his advantage, kicking and tearing at Lecter's wound until he's sitting up on the table. He reaches into his pocket and wraps his fingers around the handle of Stewart's knife. Another stab wound won't kill Lecter, but it will turn the house into a crime scene. Will lifts the weapon from his pocket.

The pain does hit until his head slams against the tabletop, and by then, Lecter's already slashed him wide open. Blood runs in an angry, black river across the tabletop to a pool on his abdomen. Will seizes up on the table, head wrenched back in an agonized scream as the doctor cuts his way up, down, and everywhere.

Shock claims him. Fills his head with cotton wool, his throat with jagged, heavy air. The nerve endings in his chest fall silent, and pain becomes phantasmic, more of a memory than an event. Will perceives reality through a solid veil of fog. His entire life is a reconstruction of a crime scene, and very soon, he will wake up as if from a dream to Jack asking, "What do you see?"

Will's tongue cannot bear the weight of Hannibal's name any more than his eyes can

hold the doctor's gaze. Lecter's eyes are too dark in the moonlight. They are deep pools of black and threaten to swallow him up. The longer he looks, the more his vision closes, the more space Hannibal seems to occupy.

"Shhh…" the doctor scoops a hand under his neck, lifting and restraining his head. Will lets his eyes fall to the knife. The blade is completely immersed in his skin, while the handle is hidden in Lecter's grasp. "Will," Hannibal speaks gently, "Will, I want you to look at me."

His hand twitches. The knife swings another inch. Will's eyes leap up to Lecter's, but the pain still finds him through the many miles he's drifted away. He can taste blood on the back of his tongue. Hannibal slips out of his disguise in a rare display of mercy. He stares at Will with a child's blankness, wonder and regret vying for expression. "I'm sorry, Will," he finally decides to say. The words don't fit his mouth or the moment at all. Even deep in shock, Will can hear their foreignness.

Hannibal closes the distance between them. "I have-" he draws the knife out of Will, "-enjoyed our time together."

The blade is a bloody half-moon. Will finds it easier on the eyes than Hannibal's gaze. He falls into a thick drowse beyond memory. First he loses the feeling in his legs, then his shoulders, until his whole body is just a slab of meat for Hannibal to butcher. He's going to disappear into Hannibal's basement to die, or, worse, to be kept alive in agony. To be played with, prodded, and cut to pieces. There's a comfort in that: Will's been locked up in Hannibal long before Baltimore. He is coming home.

Strength leaves his shoulders. Nerve endings flare and then fall to sleep in his arms. He tries to make a fist but something's in the way. Something scrapes against his fingertips and fillets his fingernails. Will is finally able to stop staring at the bars on the cage and focus instead on the real locks at Baltimore, the one lock that has him trapped.

("*Hello, Will.*")

Will makes a fist. He grips the key in his pocket tightly, slipping his arm covertly along the tabletop to free it. "See..." he mutters, "I see…"

Hannibal leans in close, unable to hear. Will frees the key from his pocket. "I see… you…"

He slams the key into the lock and turns. The cell door is thrown open in explosion of thunder and light. Darkness greets him.

Happy reading!

Inside-Out (Reprise)

Chapter Summary

Disclaimer: The characters and concepts in this story are the property of Thomas Harris, Bryan Fuller, and their related affiliates. This is an amateur writing effort meant for entertainment purposes only.

I thought I could fit this all in one chapter. I couldn't, but I didn't want to wait anymore. The season 2 premier is looming, so I present to you the conclusion of The Wasteland in two parts. Notes to follow the next installment. Without further adieu…

"London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down"

~*The Wasteland* (V 426)

Chapter Thirty-Two: Inside-Out (Reprise)

Will wakes insofar as his eyes open. The world appears to him through a thick veil of fog. Voices warble through the mist, familiar but not, as images drift gradually into focus. Stewart glides through his periphery - hot and tearful, then Jack's there and Alana's there and someone's prodding at his bowels strewn on the table. Hannibal's chandelier gives way to the nighttime sky followed by the searing white of fluorescent bulbs. Will closes his eyes against the onslaught. He releases a breath and sinks into the down, deep dark.

The drowning registers centuries later. Will draws a breath against the water pounding against his lips, and fire lashes down his throat before exploding inside his gut. Noise and light assail him from all sides. He thrashes against the cacophony, desperate for air, but again the ocean claims him. He doesn't need to breathe anymore.

Awareness comes with a bang, not a whimper. Will blinks, sick and shaky, and suddenly he's staring Jack Crawford in the face. He sucks back a breath, then another, and… *can't remember*. Not with any real clarity. Even his experience of the moment is stunted and hazy. Every second strikes and fades; Will lets it. He's preoccupied with the steady itch clawing its way through his abdomen. "Were you saying something?" he chokes.

Jack nods slowly, thoughtfully. His pause is too long. "No. No, I just wanted to see how you were doing," he hangs his head, ashamed of himself. "Get some rest, Will."

"I can't sleep," he admits.

“I’ll get a doctor,” Alana joins the conversation. Will glances in her direction. She looks marginally better than he feels. “I knew they dropped his meds too quickly.”

“We were talking,” he remembers voices. They all blend together. “What happened to me?”

“We shouldn’t talk about this now.”

Will’s arms are dead weight on the mattress, but he can’t feel the cold bite of a handcuff on his wrist. He really should: Jack can’t be happy about him breaking into Hannibal’s home. Meaning? “You got Dr. Lecter.”

“I’ve told you that three times now, Will,” Jack sighs.

The memory of their conversation doesn’t exist. For once, Will doesn’t care. He has the only thing he needs to stay in the moment. Jack takes the liberty of articulating it for him when his words fail, “We got him.”

Relief filters slowly through the twisted synapses of Will’s brain. He knows it’s coming, can feel it building through the oscillation of panic and chemical numb. Will’s on a collision course with what might be the greatest catharsis he’s ever experienced. Jack continues speaking, “His basement contained everything we needed.”

Will remembers to breathe, just breathe, “Did I…did I kill him?”

Jack’s face is torn between professional resolve and personal frustration. “No, Will. You didn’t. Neither did Stewart when she shot him six times.”

Who feels more regretful of that sad fact is a tough contest. Will can’t swallow the lump in his throat. He’s been so convinced that death is the only true justice for Hannibal Lecter. Anything less seems like a failure. “Where is he?”

“Will…”

“Where. Is. He.”

Being stabbed and shot six times is liable to land anyone in the hospital. Will searches the room, expecting to find the doctor in a second bed. The FBI has afforded him private accommodations, though Will has a hard time seeing the logic in that conclusion beyond his blinding rage.

(His abdomen is nothing but fuel for the fire.)

Jack draws closer, trying to occupy as much space as possible so Will has no choice but to focus on him, “Dr. Lecter is awaiting transfer to a maximum security psychiatric facility.” And because his words are having no effect, “He won’t ever get out, Will.”

The relief passes over Will in a wave of comforting heat before vanishing into the ether. He is left cold, wasted, and in tremendous pain. Hannibal is still carving him up, from the inside out this time, and there’s not enough morphine in the world to make that pain go away.

(The Ripper will never see the inside of a prison cell.)

Alarms are going off. Jack's shouting around him (for him, about him) and then the room opens up along with his stomach. Blood and bowels splatter over the doctor's faces. Will drains out of consciousness in a great, hot rush.

He's still in hell when he wakes up. The hospital room itches: blanket of steel wool, walls of burlap. His stomach burns. All his organs are making a mass exodus. If Will opens his mouth, his lungs will come tumbling out.

(Hannibal can cook them into a protein scramble; Will chokes on vomit.)

Stewart woke him. She stands out amidst a sea of flowers and well-wishes in the room, looking as sharp and angry as her hunting knife. Her appearance is more feral though, wilder. Whatever happened at Hannibal's house drove her out of domestication and straight back into primal instincts. "Go back to sleep," she says by way of a greeting, sliding back towards the door.

"I heard you shot Hannibal Lecter," Will croaks.

"Yeah," she drags a hand through her hair, unable to so much as look at the bed. Will has become the elephant in the room. "Sorry I didn't hit him in the head or some other vital organ."

Will accepts her apology, "That's not why you're here."

"No. I was leaving. Figured I should stop by, see how you were doing."

"Your arm's healed."

Stewart nods, "You've been out a long time. Jack tell you?"

"I don't remember. I don't want to know," he eyes her strangely. Stewart's face isn't the only thing that's changed: she's wearing jeans and a t-shirt on a day when she should be on active duty. "You going somewhere, agent?"

"I'm not an agent anymore. Resigned that night at Lecter's."

"You had killed people before Hannibal Lecter."

"Yeah, and I didn't kill Lecter," Stewart snaps. "I thought I was shooting you. And then I realized why I was shooting him. Then I get into the dining room and find my knife in his gut, find you in pieces…and that basement."

Will doesn't need to hear more. He reconstructs her: the misplaced anger, the shock at shooting Lecter, the horror of revelation, and then whatever Hannibal kept locked up in his

basement. The only thing his imagination can't fathom is what was horrifying enough to inspire a natural like Stewart to quit.

As if sensing this, Stewart tells him, "He kept her alive, you know? Jack's protégée? Miriam Lass." She dips behind a cluster of magnolias. Will can't hear over the thunder of his heart, but he knows she's crying.

(*…Miriam Lass's right arm is an empty space, and Stewart's arm is still attached. She's been such a fool for so many reasons…)*

"Dr. Lecter likes to keep things in cages," he says.

Stewart doesn't answer for a long time. Will appreciates the silence. His mind is quiet. Thoughts come in short bursts. Miriam Lass locked up in a windowless room for two years, Hannibal Lecter receiving a life sentence instead of a death penalty, all the pieces of himself doomed to rot in Hannibal's house…

"I cry about everything now," Stewart still doesn't emerge from her flower shield. "Didn't shed a tear for fifteen years, and now I get choked up about nothing."

"Don't take it with you," Will offers. The response is instinctive and holds the darkness at bay just long enough before popping out like a candle.

"I've got a basement of my own," Stewart breathes. "Had one for years. And it looks a lot like his."

Will knows all too well how she feels.

She emerges, the menace more plain in her eyes than before, "I'm sorry that I didn't kill him."

"I'm sorry that I didn't kill him too," Will agrees.

"I left you a present. On the table. 'm not exactly the type to bring flowers and chocolates seemed like more like a taunt," Will has to smile a little at that, sadly. He looks towards the table on the far wall. Amidst a small rainforest of bouquets lies a crumpled evidence bag. Will recognizes the black shape inside all too well as Stewart's hunting knife. "Doctors still think you're a suicide risk, but I convinced them to let me leave it out of your reach. Seemed a little tasteless but…I don't know. This whole case is tasteless. Him living seems tasteless. This at least feels right."

"Nothing feels right," Will mumbles. The room, his pulse, Hannibal's sentence: all of it feels wrong. The world is worse, in many ways, than Baltimore, but only because Will continues to feel imprisoned by the doctor's existence.

"As right as things can get then," Stewart shrugs. "If you're going to carry Hannibal Lecter around, you might as well have a weapon."

Will can't deny that.

There's nothing but bad news on the other side of sleep. Will avoids the waking world as much as possible for as long as possible, until the doctors start talking about dependency, depression, and rehabilitation. He ends up awake with a permanent itch on the inside of his intestines, which is how Freddie Lounds's pictures find him a week later.

(He oughtn't to have been watching television at all.)

At first, Will doesn't recognize himself in the image. The harsh glow of hospital lighting meets the garish, gray tone of dead skin. Tubes snake inside and around the body. There's an endless supply of white bandages covering the corpse's midsection. The tagline informs him an FBI profiler has captured the Chesapeake Ripper, and a newscaster states that the agent's name is Will Graham.

His hollow shell of a body floods with hate. Freddie's retribution doesn't come as a shock, but the content does. Will expected slander, expected lies, but the truth is so much more damning in this case. She finally let that be the basis of her story.

The doctors stop talking about his symptoms at long last and begin to focus on treatment. Will half-hears discussion about psychiatric facilities in the area, transfers. He's already receiving regular visits from a psychologist, but their exchanges don't amount to much. He slips back into the dark forts in his head, the ones that look like a strange blend of Hobbs's hunting shack and the basement at Baltimore. The world can't reach him there.

(Hannibal can and does, but he doesn't smile anymore. He bleeds from his thigh and waist as Will falls to pieces in front of him.)

Will regards physiotherapy with the same detachment he's come to regard everything else. He carefully compartmentalizes his brain to handle the work without associating. His body follows commands then, but Will keeps sinking further and further away. He doesn't recognize his progress until he's at the door of his hospital room, slouching on his own two feet.

He lets himself wake up for just a moment. The ability to leave without transfer finally dawns upon him. It's enough to keep him out of his mind palace for the rest of the day, though he finds his way back when transfer-talk filters into his room again.

"They should just get on with it," Will mutters to Alana when she visits that night.

She gives nothing away, "There are complications."

"What complications? Am I not crazy enough for him?"

"Just focus on getting better physically," Alana says, patting his hand to punctuate the end of the conversation. The way she doesn't meet his eyes suggests that for once, the

complications aren't from his unique psychology. She's up against odds of an entirely different nature, ones that she finds neither fair nor breakable.

"I'm not going back to Baltimore," Will says blankly.

Alana replies with renewed vigor: "Never." She grips Will's hand tightly in hers; he still notices her lower lip trembling. "Not for any reason."

The silence assuages what little fear Will has allowed himself to feel. He basks in the relief from the quiet, from the iron grip of Alana's hand on his.

Her voice softens. Will isn't the only one disassociating from present pains. "Hannibal," Alana says, "on the other hand…"

He casts a glance in her direction. Alana does not, cannot meet his gaze. She is looking beyond the hospital room to all the signs she misread, ignored, or failed to see. Her own stomach is tossing from all the meals at Lecter's house, all the victims that were screaming from justice as she chewed them up and swallowed. Will empathizes without sympathizing. He doesn't blame her, but out of respect, he can't shield her from Hannibal's machinations either. She's an intelligent person undone by an even more intelligent monster. There's nothing to say that changes that.

Will lets his impression of Alana go and looks beyond the room himself: to Hannibal's future instead of his past. The good doctor is masked and restrained, wheeled down to the ancient basement at Baltimore Psychiatric Hospital, and Chilton looks on, grinning smugly from ear to ear.

It's enough to make Will smile too, though hardly in the same way. His face is taut, unwilling. *Unhappy*. Lecter being locked up is a cruel parody of justice, even if he is at the mercy of Dr. Chilton. Will can't see the good doctor succumbing to chemical persuasion or electroconvulsive therapy. He is going to be Chilton's prize and an incorruptible one at that.

"He's never getting out, Will," Alana reminds him.

Will's whole body seizes up. He can barely breathe through the tears and hate and fear. "Neither am I…"

Epilogue

Chapter Summary

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Shantih is described as a great, overwhelming state of peace.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"*Shantih shantih shantih*"

~The Wasteland (V 433)

Epilogue

He hobbles along the hospital corridor. Past dusk, the floor is quiet. The occasional nurse or doctor makes their way from the main station to a patient's room. Will passes by without so much as a glance. He's become a permanent fixture in the wing. The world has forgotten about him just as he has forgotten about it.

The pain in his abdomen is fading. Will still wakes up prying at the skin though, because the itch remains, buried deep between his organs. A piece of the knife lodged in his flesh forever perhaps, or the doctor's phantom fingers prying at him from Baltimore. One of the two. He is going to be released soon, but no one will clarify as to whether that's a euphemism for transfer.

(He can make two laps of the floor now before his legs start shaking. Given enough time, Will expects to walk out of the hospital when the doctors aren't looking and disappear for real this time.)

"Mr. Graham?"

Will responds out of habit and only just. He stops walking and looks back to the feet of the attending standing several paces behind. "I know it's late, but you have a visitor."

He is tired of visitors. Alana spends more time at his bedside than she does at work. Jack's wife comes in his stead. Bev stays for old movies. Will can't retreat with all these wandering eyes and grasping hands. He directs a hardened gaze towards the visitor's chest,

preparing a curt apology and dismissal as he does so, but he never gets the chance. The silver jewellery, the polite attire, the watery stare swallow up any rebuttal he might develop.

"Hello, Will," she says kindly.

He greets the floor, "Hello, Dr. Lampman."

"I'm sorry about the late hour." She's not. Lampman chose the hour intentionally. She knows Will is more cogent at night than he is during the day. "I have been meaning to come visit you. Tonight seemed as good a time as any."

Will holds his pose, a rock against the rising tide. He wishes there were words that would make her leave, words that wouldn't hurt her more than he already has. There aren't. Words are in pathetically short supply.

Lampman comes with plenty, and she shares them openly with Will. "May I walk with you?"

He musters a nod, if the quick, jerking movements of his head could be called that. Lampman thanks the doctor and takes her place at his side. Her stride is inconsistent now, the left leg lags, but she has otherwise recovered from her ordeal without incident.

Will lets her occupy a void in his vision. He doesn't so much glance her way as they creep around the corridor. Lampman, as per usual, allows him to set the pace and tone for their time together. She is content to be regarded as empty air. At least Will's responding to her.

One lap is enough to cripple Will in her presence. He finds himself increasingly dependent on his IV stand. Gravity is gaining force, dragging him back into the ground. He finally has to come out with it, even if the words aren't quite right. "I didn't want to hurt you," Will says breathlessly. He comes to a halt near his room and finally looks at her (well, at her folded hands). His tics come back in full force. "I shouldn't have done…what I did. I shouldn't…and I'm sorry."

Lampman is too calm. Will wants fury, deserves scorns, has earned some level of resentment, but aside for the slight pain in her expression, Lampman remains accepting, open. "Thank you, Will," she replies. "I appreciate that."

He wants to scream. There's a good one building under the hook-shaped gash running across his waist. Lampman's unerring gentility sets him on edge. "Why are you here?" Will demands. "You aren't looking for an apology. Why are you here?"

"You're still my patient."

"A formality, Dr. Lampman. And an unnecessary one."

"Why do you say that?"

"I'm fine. I'm fine!" his throat closes, refusing to say more.

Lampman stares him down. It doesn't take much to cast fissures on Will's fragile mental state. He starts to crack the second he finishes speaking, and her gaze causes what little repair work he's done to burst. Will chokes for breath, clasping in vain at all the many hurts he's experiencing. "I...need…to get out of here. Out of me, out of this hospital… he's…he's still alive. We're both in that basement together now, and it's *killing me*. But I can't go to another hospital. I can't deal with any more doctors."

Her silence is so forgiving. Will feels himself diffusing, feels the walls he's built up slowly start to expand. The crushing weight of his self-imposed imprisonment ceases to hold him down. "You were good for me, Dr. Lampman," he breathes. "I wish we had met when I needed something good for me."

"What about now?" Lampman offers.

Will laughs. "I assaulted you, Doctor. The same night I assaulted my previous psychiatrist…" he hasn't noticed the consistency of his actions until now. "You might be good for me, but I'm not good for you."

"I'm a psychiatrist, Will. None of my patients are good for me."

Touché.

Lampman flashes one of her characteristic micro-smiles. The image fades as quickly as it appears. "I won't force you to come back to Bethesda."

"I'm not going back."

"Your doctors are insisting that you receive psychiatric treatment for depression and post-traumatic stress disorder though. I don't disagree with them. Do you?"

Will can't. He knows the signs of depression: the apathy, the dreaminess, the sleeplessness. PTSD has been chasing him since Hobbs, so that's nothing new. "I feel better when I'm sick," he admits. "People bother me less."

"People don't go away just because you're sick."

"I can go away because I'm sick."

"You want justification."

"I want liberation."

"Let me help you, Will."

He has to lean against the wall for support. The IV stand requires too much of his strength to grip. Lampman hovers but not claustrophobically. Will still has the ability to walk away from her if he can find the strength. "I can't go back to who I was," he says. "I don't even know who that was anymore."

“I don’t know who that was either,” Lampman agrees. Her intention is to draw him forward, not pull him back. The exact opposite of Hannibal.

Will considers her. Considers the offer, the implications, the risks. “It’s not like-” he laughs, “It’s not like I can do any worse than right now.”

Lampman, mercifully, doesn’t respond to that. “Think about it,” she says. “I understand if you would prefer another physician.”

He nods, mouth dry. The thought of having his brain worked on is unappealing even in his depressed state, but Will can’t deny that if he’s ever come close to being free, Lampman’s the one who got him there. He glances into her eyes in thanks, then peers down the hall.

“I’m supposed to make another lap,” he says.

“Do you mind if I join you?”

Will shakes his head. No, he doesn’t mind. In fact, Lampman’s presence bolsters him to the point where he can keep going. He pushes off from the wall and begins the long walk around.

Chapter End Notes

Some parting thoughts:

Part of the reason the writing in these chapters is so non-specific is because of Will’s state of mind. Depression and post-traumatic stress do cause fatigue, disorientation, loss of energy and interest, and disassociation.

The final fight between Will and Hannibal is based on the account provided in Red Dragon. The curved blade Hannibal uses is supposed to be a linoleum knife.

Stewart is based on information from the novel too. Apparently, Will was accompanied by an *Officer* Stewart at Hannibal’s house. Stewart ended up leaving law enforcement and managing a hotel after seeing Lecter’s basement. I think Lecter is being sarcastic when he praises Stewart in the book, but I decided that she should be a genuine opponent for him.

I really hope that you have enjoyed this fic. It is a real joy to hear back from so many readers. This has been one of the longest running stories I’ve completed in a long time, and I could not have done that without support. Thank you for joining me on the he-ate-us! Your kind words and readership are greatly appreciated. I look forward to seeing you all around the site. Thank you so much!

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